

RETENTION AND ATTRITION OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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A number of studies have been conducted on the attrition rates of undergraduate and graduate students. However, the body of knowledge concerning attrition for doctoral students, especially those who have attained the level of “all but dissertation” (ABD), is limited.

The purpose of this research was to examine retention and attrition factors of doctoral candidates from a typical Higher Education Doctoral Program (Research II Public Institution) who were admitted to candidacy from 1991 through July 2000. Participation of the subject population was limited to those who had attained the level of ABD--those who had previously fulfilled the residency, coursework, foreign language or tool-subject requirements, and successfully completed the comprehensive/qualifying exams. This population included current ABDs, previously attrited ABDs, and graduates of the degree program.

The research study was qualitative and intended to identify the effect of specific, predetermined factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students towards the doctoral degree in higher education. This study obtained responses to questions from the questionnaire/survey instrument concerning factors that affected program completion or attrition. Students had the opportunity to elaborate on factors from their dissertation, advisement, and personal, financial, and

employment experiences that affected their ability to complete the program through open-ended question responses.

By examining key factors in the doctoral degree experience from the three sample groups (current ABDs, previous ABDs, and graduated Ed.Ds), this study was able to draw some conclusions about doctoral attrition. Reconstructing and comparing the experiences of ABDs from the point of candidacy to the point of attrition or completion of the program determined trends, commonalities, and issues affecting achievement.

Results of this study add to the limited research concerning ABD attrition and provide an insight from the student perspective as to the obstacles and support variables in the quest for the doctoral degree.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This year in the United States, almost 44,000 graduate students will receive their doctoral degrees. During the period of 2000 through 2005, about 261,600 doctorates are projected to be conferred (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 1999, p. 25). On the surface, this appears to be positive news for U.S. colleges and universities, which will be trying to hire new faculty and staff during the same period. But what about the others, who entered doctoral studies, completed all their coursework, residency requirements, foreign language or tool-subject, passed their comprehensive exams, and were in the dissertation phase of their program? Approximately 65,400 doctoral candidates will be casualties of attrition from higher education programs across the United States.

Statement of the Problem

There are many stakeholders in doctoral candidates' rise from ABD to the final attainment of their doctoral degree. In addition to the students themselves, the research advisor or major professor,

. . . the university; and society as a whole – have a vital interest in the successful outcome of every thesis or dissertation project. Every time a graduate student's dissertation sheds some light on a dark corner of human understanding and banishes some segment, however small, of the world's mystery, society reaps incalculable benefits. (Madsen, 1992, p. 8)

The problem is in identifying and examining the factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the retention and attrition factors of doctoral candidates in a typical Higher Education Doctoral Program (Research II Public Institution).

The Research Question and Subquestions

As in the study conducted by L. H. Myers (1999) to describe ABD attrition, the researcher sought to answer the one primary research question, with five subquestions:

What do candidates of a Higher Education Doctoral Program selected for this study (Research II Public Institution) perceive as obstacles to completion of the doctoral degree?

1. What are the perceived doctoral program factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?
2. What are the perceived committee advisement factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?
3. What are the perceived personal factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?
4. What are the perceived financial factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?
5. What are the perceived employment factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?

The factors affecting dissertation completion were determined by analyzing student responses to the survey instrument of their experiences in the doctoral program after attaining ABD status.

Limitations and Delimitations

Participation of subject population was limited to those who attained the level of ABD, those who had previously met the residency requirements, course completion, foreign language or tool-subject requirements, and successfully completed the comprehensive/qualifying exams. This group consisted of all ABD doctoral students in a typical Higher Education Doctoral Program who were admitted to candidacy from 1991 through July 2000. This population included current ABDs, previously attrited ABDs, and graduates of the degree program. Current students who had not reached this level by the time of sample selection were not included.

Random sampling of the defined population was not desired, since the rationale for using the special classes of participants was (a) to focus upon their experiences and (b) to ascertain the possible obstacles to completion of the dissertation and subsequent attainment of the doctoral degree. No other special classes of participants were required.

The following assumptions were made in conducting this study:

1. The Graduate School and the Higher Education Doctoral Program maintain accurate records.
2. Progress by students to attain the level of ABD demonstrates a strong commitment to complete the dissertation process and attain the doctoral degree.

3. Participants were exposed to similar environmental conditions and program requirements within the Higher Education Doctoral Program and were subject to similar factors or obstacles towards completion of their dissertation.

4. The expanded open-ended questionnaire provided a more comprehensive method for focusing upon student experiences through their written commentary and elaborations than the traditional Likert-type scale.

5. Participants would respond honestly, openly, and truthfully to the questionnaire. “It is assumed that time did not substantially distort their recollections of a major life event, the doctoral process” (L. H. Myers, 1999, p. 11).

Definition of Terms

ABD: “All but dissertation” doctoral students who have completed all coursework, language or tool-subject requirements, and residency requirements; have successfully completed the qualifying exams; and are within the time limit of their program. At this point, all that remains is the writing and defense of the dissertation.

Attrition: The voluntary or involuntary discontinuance of a student’s participation in the degree program prior to completion.

Completer: A person who has completed all requirements for the doctoral degree, including the dissertation, and has been awarded the degree.

Comprehensive or Qualifying Exams: Series of written and oral examinations encompassing all previous coursework in the student’s major and minor field of doctoral studies.

Course Completion: Student’s completion of all doctoral course requirements.

Doctoral Candidate: The formal identification used for those doctoral students who have completed all coursework, residency, language or tool-subject, and comprehensive/qualifying exam requirements. The unofficial classification for these students is ABD.

Noncompleter: A person who has not completed all requirements for the doctoral degree, including the dissertation, and has not been awarded the degree.

Persistence: The continuance of a student's progress towards degree completion.

Residency Requirement: Requirement to complete a full schedule (at least 12 semester hours) of graduate coursework in each of two consecutive terms. Students holding half-time graduate assistantships may satisfy the requirement by taking at least 9 hours of course work in each of the two long terms and 6 hours in the summer (Texas Tech University, 2000, p.36).

Time Limit or Time-to-degree: All requirements for the doctoral degree to be completed within a period of 8 consecutive calendar years (Texas Tech University, 2000, p.38).

Significance of the Study

This study adds to the body of knowledge regarding the experiences of ABD students during the dissertation phase of their doctoral program. It provides relevant data about the factors and obstacles encountered by these students and provide better insight into how they dealt with these issues. Because only a limited amount of information is available on this population, it will be of interest to a myriad of stakeholders in the higher education process, particularly students and those administering doctoral programs.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents relevant information on the factors and obstacles to dissertation completion found from the literature review. There have been a number of studies on attrition; however, the majority of information on doctoral attrition concentrates on student research projects for the dissertation. This wealth of information provides a more comprehensive look into the more prominent variables relating to doctoral degree attrition.

Historical Background

Graduate education in the United States has a relatively short history. Graduate study started at Harvard College in 1826, and soon after, in 1829, Princeton began its program. The actual awarding of the doctorate did not occur until over 30 years later, in 1861. Yale University was the first American institution to confer the Ph.D., and Harvard followed in 1873 (Malaney, 1988). In 1875, U.S. universities granted 23 Ph.D. degrees. The numbers continued to rise at a rate of about 7% per year, and for the period of 1875 to 1879, 161 doctorates had been awarded.

By the turn of the 20th century, doctorates were being awarded at the rate of 382 per year. Harmon (1978) stated,

This growth rate has fluctuated widely, particularly as a result of World Wars I and II and also as a result of the great economic depression of the 1930's, as well

as for reasons that cannot be accurately determined, particularly at the early years of this century [20th century]. (p. 1)

By 1970, the number of awarded doctorates surpassed 31,000 per year. The National Science Foundation reported that over 1 million doctorates (1,174,442) have been awarded during the past 40 years; of these, 33.8% were conferred within the last 10 years (Sanderson, Dugoni, Hoffer, & Selfa, 1999). The rate of doctoral enrollments is expected to slow over the next 4 years; however, it is anticipated that rates will start increasing by the year 2005 (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 1999, p. 25).

According to the National Science Foundation's [NSF] Doctorate Recipients from United States Universities: Summary Report 1998, colleges and universities in the United States awarded 42,683 research doctoral degrees (Sanderson et al., 1999). The field of education accounted for 15.4% of these degrees, a decline from the 1968 rate of 17.6%. Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) revealed that approximately 5% of the 42,683 degrees, or 2,255 doctoral degrees, were awarded to students in educational administrative and supervision fields (U. S. Department of Education, 1999). Degree completion by women has continued to rise: "Women continued to increase their proportion of the Ph.D. pool, earning 13,452 doctorates, or 48% of those granted to Americans. That compares to 42% 10 years ago and 29% 20 years ago" (Magner, 1999, para. 6). The highest percentages of doctorates awarded to females are in the field of education. The proportion of recipients has risen significantly over the past 4 decades: 19.9% in 1968, 39.7% in 1978, 55.2% in 1988, and 62.8% in 1998 (NSF, 1999).

The NSF's report also revealed an increase in minority Ph.D. attainment: African Americans (1,467) had an increase of 1.1%, or 131 Ph.D.'s awarded in 1997; Hispanics (1,190) had an increase of 1.14%, or 143 Ph.D.'s awarded in 1997; Asians (1,168) had a decrease of 9%, or 128 Ph.D.'s awarded in 1997; and American Indians (189) had an increase of 1.14%, or 20 Ph.D.'s awarded in 1997. Magner (1999) observed that the National Science Foundation report "held good news for universities interested in increasing the diversity of the Ph.D. pool. More minority Americans than ever, 4,014, earned doctorates in 1998, up from 3,845 the previous year" (para. 9).

Attrition rates of college and university students in undergraduate programs have been, and will continue to be, the focus of numerous research and dissertation studies. Data obtained from these efforts enable institutions to assess or validate their productivity, efficiency, quality of services, and to respond to the concerns of their stakeholders (Hanson, 1992). Specifically, the data may direct a more indepth evaluation of entrance requirements, curriculum content, and prerequisite course needs; degree programs; quality of student services, housing, and food services; counseling and administrative support services; financial aid, scholarship, and work study availability and processes; and library facilities and computer lab resources. To a certain degree, retention and attrition studies provide a more detailed perspective of what the institution is doing to be "more inclusive and diverse by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, and other factors" (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 7).

Two of the most notable studies of doctoral attrition were conducted by Bernard Berelson in 1960 and William Bowen and Neil Rudenstine in 1992. Berelson's (1960) Graduate Education in the United States was the first comprehensive study of graduate

education, and it provided a wealth of data on retention and attrition. Data included time-to-degree, financial resources, student ability and motivation, department and program structure, and completion rates. An interesting perspective on attrition was found in the views of graduate deans and faculty. Graduate deans speculated that attrition from doctoral programs ranged from 50% to 55%, whereas faculty thought the rate was about 20%. Neither group felt that graduate attrition was a major concern. Bowen and Rudenstine's (1992) work, In Pursuit of the Ph.D., continued the investigation of attrition for the period of 1962 to 1986. Their work focused upon the doctoral programs in the arts and sciences at leading research institutions. Their work examined completion rates by program of study and size of the graduate program, as well as the influences of teaching assistants and financial support on student time-to-degree. They also focused on the relationship of the time between completing undergraduate studies and completing the doctorate.

Malaney (1995) made the point that "the differences between undergraduate and graduate students make generalizations of undergraduate research difficult to apply to the graduate population" (as cited in Cooke, Sims, & Peyrefitte, 1995, para. 1). In addition, the need for retention and attrition studies in doctoral programs has not received the same attention as those in undergraduate programs. This may be due to the smaller number of students in doctoral studies than in undergraduate programs--where retention and attrition impact has a greater focus.

The Council of Graduate Schools in the United States (1977) declared, "The doctoral program is designed to prepare a student for a lifetime of intellectual inquiry that manifests itself in creative scholarship and research" (p. 1). Consequently, the pinnacle of

doctoral program success is the completion of the doctoral dissertation. Objectives of the dissertation are to demonstrate the students' ability to (a) conduct extensive and independent research, (b) accurately interpret the data, (c) make an original contribution to the body of knowledge through a new analysis or synthesis of previous research, and (d) document the findings and share the results of the research (Chambers, 1960; Davis & Parker, 1997; Mellon Institute of Sciences and Carnegie Institute of Technology, Graduate Studies, 1970).

The steps needed to attain the doctorate differ to a certain degree from institution to institution. The general coursework requirements are to complete concentrated study in a major and minor field, earning a minimum amount of graduate credit beyond the bachelor's and master's degrees. The concentration of coursework is defined in detail by the division or program supervisory committee. An entrance examination is normally required for entry into the doctoral program. Upon successful completion of the entrance examination, the student is assigned a graduate advisor. The advisor works with the doctoral student throughout the program. In addition to maintaining a required grade point average, several milestones and requirements must be met by the student. These include meeting residency requirements; completing the entire degree program within a predetermined time-period; mastering a foreign language or tool-subject requirement; completing a degree plan; completing qualifying examinations, usually written and oral; and completing the dissertation. Of particular note, the doctoral student becomes a doctoral candidate after completing coursework, language or tool-subject requirements, residency requirements, and successfully completing the qualifying exams. At this point,

all that remains is the dissertation; doctoral candidates are commonly referred to as ABD, meaning “all but dissertation.”

Doctoral students enter the program with a different base from which to grow than do those in undergraduate or master’s programs. The doctoral student is usually more mature, self-assured, skilled in negotiation and rationalization, adept at synthesizing complex information, well-developed in communication and leadership skills, adept at handling multiple role responsibilities, and effective in decision making (Phillips, 1996). Sometimes, these same well-prepared students encounter obstacles to completing the final stage of their doctoral program--the dissertation. The dissertation “requires independent activity that must meet specific guidelines, with many unique hurdles to overcome and many decisions to make to arrive at a satisfactory study” (Kluever & Green, 1998, para.3). According to Smith (1982), “Some students find that they can never take that giant step of writing the dissertation, and some begin, but never complete, the project” (as cited in Vartuli, 1982, p. 37).

Writing the dissertation can be an intimidating experience because the process, format, and requirements are somewhat alien. The dissertation “challenges all graduate students, even top-grade, well-published ones, because it calls on skills far exceeding those required by course papers or even journal articles” (Association for Support of Graduate Students [ASGS], 2000a). The dissertation is frequently the ABD’s initial independent research effort. In most instances, this is the first time the student has been placed in a position of planning, managing, and completing a task of this magnitude--and one so important to his or her future and career. Ramos (1995) described this period as the ABD phenomenon. It is a time during which many students experience an increased

sense of isolation, insecurity, and uncertainty about their abilities; have feelings of disenchantment, frustration, embarrassment, and guilt; and are somewhat at a loss as to how to complete the final stage of their program.

There is a wide range of student involvement in completing each dissertation task.

Some students take a dominant role meeting these requirements, and others assume that the university (advisor/committee) will provide the initiative for completing each task. And, for some students, tasks are never completed and the possibility of obtaining a doctorate fades away. (Kluever & Green, 1998, para. 10)

According to Cahill (1999), “A.B.D.’s are a dime a dozen” (para. 13). So who is to blame for ABDs’ lack of completion? In general, both academia and the departing student each blame the student for failure. In the absence of accurate exit interviewing or feedback, the actual reasons for incompleteness are rarely known (Lovitts, 1997b).

Although data are relatively easy to obtain concerning successful doctoral graduates, colleges and universities are reluctant to publish statistical data pertaining to unsuccessful doctoral candidates (Monsour & Corman, 1991). Interest in doctoral retention and attrition data is normally limited to those associated with these programs in the university, rather than on a large university-wide examination (Lee & Cayer, 1987; Middleton, Mason, Stilwell, & Parker, 1988). Faculty, program offices, or doctoral students working on dissertations complete most of the research, data collection, and analysis. The results of this research receive far less distribution or widespread interest than do those from undergraduate programs. Records of unsuccessful ABD doctoral candidates are difficult to obtain because there are no nationwide data banks or records available. The proportion of ABDs to graduates is unknown or even “how long they’ve

been in that category, and how those figures compare with the previous years” (Leatherman, 2000, A18). The majority of ABD attrition information can be obtained only from a particular program within a college or university. At this juncture, the concern for confidentiality of student records becomes a factor, limiting available avenues for discovery. Data about terminal ABDs and their attrition must be pieced together from a variety of resources; that is, graduate office records, enrollment records, dissertation advisors’ records and memories, class rosters, alumni, ex-students associations, or even graduation programs.

In general, attrition rates of doctoral students entering the program range between 40% and 60% (Berelson, 1960; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Cheatham, Edwards, & Erikson, 1982; Cuetara & LeCapitaine, 1991). However, in an attrition study by Lunneborg and Lunneborg (1973), the data revealed that 35% of doctoral students dropped out of the program during their first 4 years of study (p. 381). Davis and Parker (1997) speculated that “perhaps as many as one-third of doctoral candidates complete the course requirements, but never the dissertation” (p. 6). Most of these students persist in completing all planned coursework before dropping out of the program (Sigafus, 1998). Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) reported that those reaching the level of ABD had an 80% chance of completing the program. Quinn (1992) supported this view in her research on time-to-degree. She reported that students completing the qualifying exams had an 82.4% chance of attaining their degree.

The “facetious references to the ‘A.B.D.’ (all but dissertation) often cloak the bitter acknowledgement of unfulfilled aspirations and altered career plans (Madsen, 1992, xi). Altered plans include changing departments, majors, and degree programs midway

through the student's doctoral program. Gonzalez (1997) found that after 9 years of doctoral studies, 5.4% of the population at the University of Toronto migrated to a program different from the one they began. These numbers were less than those found in the Program of Higher Education at the University of North Texas with only 2.83% changed majors (UNT, 2000, p. 2).

Although the factors associated with retention and attrition are similar in nature in affecting student progress, they are not identical (Hamilton, 1998). Jacks, Chubin, Porter, and Connolly (1983) conducted one of the more interesting investigations into ABD attrition. Their research attempted to provide insight into the students' reasons for leaving the doctoral program; the impact upon their professional life; and an assessment of the value of the Ph.D. for possible changes in requirements. Their research data results were divided into major programs of study: psychology, sociology, biosciences, physics, and electrical engineering. However, the major themes expressed by all students showed the following variables adversely influencing their progress: (a) poor working relationship with doctoral committees and advisors; (b) substantive problems with dissertation research and topic selection; (c) financial needs, obligations, and difficulties; (d) family pressures and demands; (e) lack of peer support; (f) personal or emotional problems; (g) interference of paid work (full-time or part-time) with dissertation work; (h) loss of interest and motivation; and (i) receipt of an attractive job offer or relocation.

All respondents of the survey felt that future opportunities for growth, career advancement, and salary would be limited. In addition, most felt that the dissertation process should essentially remain unchanged.

In identifying characteristics that facilitate or inhibit degree completion, Emerson (1998) determined that successful dissertation completers rated family support, perseverance, and peer support for their accomplishment; whereas noncompleters cited job pressures, personal problems, and problems with the research topic as inhibitors to their completion. Some of these same factors were identified by Green and Kluever (1997) in their dissertation barrier research of 142 successful graduates and 97 ABDs. Results of this investigation confirmed four significant obstacles to successful completion of the dissertation phase of the degree program: (a) advisor/committee functioning, (b) personal organizational skills, (c) time management and external pressures, and (d) student research skills. Kluever's (1997b) study of 142 doctoral graduates and 97 ABDs found differences in each group's sense of responsibility, employment patterns, financial aid and problems, lack of research skills and experience, and external sources of moral encouragement.

The research by L. H. Myers (1999) examined key factors in attrition of ABDs in the College of Human Resources and Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. His study focused on those ABDs who were unable to complete the dissertation and subsequently left the doctoral program. Just as importantly, this research study sought to "explore rather than confirm contributing factors leading to attrition" (p. 59). Time and finances were defined as the major obstacles to dissertation completion; these were followed by frustration and/or loss of interest, financial considerations, family considerations, and time and support considerations. The majority of respondents (54%) reported relationship difficulties with their advisor and/or committee members. Balancing

family, personal obligations, and employment were detrimental factors for dissertation completion for 64% of the respondents. Financial and employment factors adversely affected over 70% of the ABDs' ability to complete their dissertation.

Factors Affecting Success

As mentioned earlier, a number of research studies have attempted to isolate the rudimentary causes of ABD attrition. The variables identified by these researchers can be grouped into factors over which the student has some degree of control and those over which they have no control. Research studies have sought to show comparisons concerning age, gender, race, employment, financial support, motivation, advisor and committee interaction, or lack of structure and preparation of students during the dissertation stage of their program, as contributing factors in noncompletion of the doctorate. In general, the factors of age (Berry, 1994; McGhee, 1993; Quinn, 1992), race (Aragon, 1999; Ballew, 1997; Beeler, 1993; Cooke et al., 1995; Garcia, 1997; Hamilton, 1998; E. S. W. Harrison, 1997; J. L. Harrison, 1998; Loo & Rolison, 1995; McGhee, 1993; Quezada et al., 1984; Solorzano, 1993; Suen, 1995; Wiemers, 1999), and gender (Aronson, Bennett, Moore, & Stoll, 1985; Barnett, 1982; Berg & Ferber, 1983; Filippelli, 1997; Gell, 1995; Germeroth, 1991; Kerlin, 1999; Lenz, 1995; Mooney, 1968; Muskopf, 1998) have not been found to contribute to completion or noncompletion of the dissertation. This is most likely due to the fact that students have no control over these variables. However, issues associated with these variables have been found to influence relationships and interactions between students, their peers, advisors, and committees, and subsequently to affect the time to degree completion.

Variables over which students have input or control are generally found to be contributors or hindrances to their completing the dissertation. These include the following:

Academic Advisement and Mentoring (ASGS, 2000b; Bako-Okolo, 1996; Bargar & Mayo-Chamberlain, 1983; Barnett, 1982; Bauer, 1997; Berelson, 1960; Bloom, 1981; Campbell, 1992; Cheatham et al., 1982; Cooper, 1997; Davis & Parker, 1997; Faghihi, Rakow, & Ethington, 1999; Filippelli, 1997; Gardner & Beatty, 1980; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Golde, 1994; Goulden, 1991; Hales, 1998; Hamilton, 1998; Harbold, 1988; Heiss, 1970; Karolyi, 1994; Lees, 1997; Levinson & Darrow, 1978; Madsen, 1992; McFarland, 1995; Monaghan, 1989; NSF, 1999; O'Bara, 1993; Schwarz, 1998)

Employment (Astin, 1975; Berry, 1994; Germeroth, 1991; Huguley, 1989; Jacks et al., 1983; Wahlstrom, 1997; Wilson, 1965; Wright, 1991)

Family Support and Obligations (Berry, 1994; Hamilton, 1998; Harbold, 1988; L. H. Myers, 1999; Powles, 1999)

Financial Assistance (Abedi & Benkin, 1987; Boydston, 1996; Cheatham et al., 1982; Davis & Parker, 1997; Dinham & Scott, 1999b; Hamilton, 1998; L. H. Myers, 1999)

Integration, Involvement, and Interaction with the Institution (Astin, 1985; Bauer, 1997; Faghihi & Ethington, 1996; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Golde, 1994; Levi, 1969; Lovitts, 1997a, 1997b; Nielson, 1998; Tinto, 1987; Weil, 1990)

Peer and Social Support Groups (Gell, 1995; Hamilton, 1998; Monaghan, 1989; Monsour & Corman, 1991; Stalker, 1991)

Personality Variables (Cooke et al., 1995; Dinham & Scott, 1999a; Hamilton, 1998)

Motivation (Bauer, 1997; Davis & Parker, 1997; Dorn, Papalewis, & Brown, 1995; L. H. Myers, 1999; Wilgers, 1992)

Persistence (Berry, 1994; Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Cohen, 1998; Davis & Parker, 1997; Dorn et al., 1995; Frasier, 1994; Golde, 1994; Karolyi, 1994; NSF, 1999; Tinto, 1987)

Procrastination (Cheatham et al., 1982; Davis & Parker, 1997; Simpson, 1986; Wilson, 1965)

Research Skills of the Student (ASGS, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Bako-Okolo, 1996; Bloom, 1981; Briggs, 1986; Dixon & Peltier, 1991; Graves, 1997; Heiss, 1967; O'Bara, 1993; Olson, 1960; Pinson, 1997; Wilson, 1965)

Program Structure (Aronson et al., 1985; Bauer, 1997; Huguley, 1989; Kluever, 1997a)

Stress (Barnett, 1982; Cooke et al., 1995; Davis & Parker, 1997; Hales, 1998; Malaney, 1988; Scrubb, 1998; Wells, 1982)

Time-to-Degree (Bair, 1999; Civian, 1990; Cuetara & LeCapitaine, 1991; Gillingham, Seneca, & Taussig, 1991; R. S. Myers, 1999; Porter & Wolfle, 1991; Wahlstrom, 1997; Wilson, 1965)

Topic Selection (Bargar & Duncan, 1982; Davis & Parker, 1997; P. D. Isaac, Koenigsknecht, Malaney, & Karras, 1989; P. D. Isaac, Quinlan, & Walker, 1992; S. Isaac & Michael, 1995; Lawton, 1997; Wilson, 1965)

In the early 1990s, Germeroth (1991) conducted a survey of 132 Ph.D. and Ed.D. recipients in communications. The intent of the research was to identify leading factors to dissertation completion, measure the severity of these obstacles, determine the value of student support structures, and obtain opinions on completing a dissertation. She found that the top three factors to dissertation completion were, (a) job related pressures and demands (27.2%); (b) time to work on the project (26.6%); and (c) the student's own perfectionism (19.7%) (p. 64).

Tluczek (1995) examined obstacles and attitudes of dissertation completers, noncompleters, and committee members from the Doctoral Program in Instructional Technology at Wayne State University. She reported that the most significant obstacles in completing the dissertation by this group were, (a) individual lack of motivation and self-discipline, (b) demands of employment, (c) lack of research skills, (d) poor relationship with advisor, (e) topic selection, and (f) lack of structure to remain on track.

L. H. Myers (1999) reported that student "frustration and/or loss of interest" (36%), "finances" (27%), and "family factors" (18%) were the reasons most commonly listed for noncompletion of the dissertation (p. 38). Supporting this premise, Kluever and Green (1998) noted that the "external support systems from the advisor and family, financial support, and reasonable time commitments for other activities affect dissertation completion positively, and the absence of them may negatively affect it" (para. 31).

In her case study of four university departmental policies, practices, and relationships, Golde (1997) found five key issues relating to student attrition:

1. Structure and timing of requirements affected student experiences.

2. Unrealistic expectations about graduate school and academic life soon led to disillusionment.
3. Relationships with advisors affected student experience.
4. Decision to attrite was viewed as a positive by the student.
5. The experiences were different for students based upon their gender.

According to LaPidus and Mishkin (1990), successful doctoral dissertation completers exhibit the traits of imagination, creativity, and productivity. They remain intensely involved emotionally and intellectually and are able to balance the rigors, stressors, and influences from internal and external sources to successfully complete their dissertation (p. 287).

Gender, Age, and Race

The situation has changed since the 1960s and 1970s, when one of the major obstacles to successful completion of the doctorate was one's gender. Mooney (1968) found that after being in the doctoral program from 6 to 8 years, only 16% of the women attained their degrees. He found possible explanations in the need for women to remain at home and care for the family and low expectations of teaching on a part-time basis. The 1980s and 1990s brought about a revolution in women's attainment of advanced degrees and a continued movement towards filling upper-level administrative positions of chancellor, president, chief executive officer, provost, vice-president, assistant vice-president and associate vice-president in academia.

Muskopf's (1998) research into identifying the proportional increases of women in these upper-level administrative positions reported that, indeed, women had made significant increases in every category during the period from 1983 through 1998.

Gordon (1999) projected that 50,900 doctoral degrees will be awarded during the year 2006 in the United States. Of these 21,600, or 42.4%, will be awarded to women, and a mere 18%, or 9,162 degrees, are projected to be awarded to African American women.

In her quest to identify critical factors influencing women's persistence, Kerlin (1999) reported that even though the women's rates of enrollment are increasing, their withdrawal rates remain higher than those of men. This may be due to their integrating into middle- and upper-level leadership positions, juggling conflicting roles, and coping with the demands of multiple responsibilities. Germeroth (1991) found this to be the second most prevalent problem from female respondents in her examination of the factors in completing the doctorate based on gender. These same Ph.D. and Ed.D. graduates in communications "rated their perfectionism as more of a problem than men did their perfectionism" (p. 67).

Previous studies on the effects of age, race, and gender were not found to be significant predictors of degree completion (Berry, 1994; McGhee, 1993; Quinn, 1992). However, in the gender research of graduate success by Berg and Ferber (1983), women students were found to be at a disadvantage in finding same-sex role models and mentors. "The positive effect of women faculty on women students might be stronger if women faculty were themselves of higher rank and perceived as more successful" (p. 631).

In his study addressing underrepresentation of Mexican American faculty members, Solorzano (1993) reported that only 0.7% of doctorates were awarded in the United States to this minority group for the period 1980 through 1990. Aragon (1999) and Quezada et al. (1984) pointed out that categorizing or stereotyping women of Hispanic and Mexican ethnicity by graduate advisors could be an inhibitor to their

success. Specifically, they recommended that faculty advisors be more sensitive to, and familiar with, the cultural, social, educational, financial, and family issues associated with this diverse group of students. Ballew (1997) and J. L. Harrison (1998) found similar results in their examinations of Native Americans' experiences in doctoral programs. The overall sense of feeling different or, in fact, being treated differently has adversely influenced this group's self-esteem and confidence. Subsequently, this minority group has experienced large attrition rates from doctoral programs. On a positive note, Garcia (1997) identified factors that facilitated completing the doctoral program by Hispanic American women. These items included family background and responsibilities; outside encouragement; grade performance; finances; understanding and dealing with racism, leadership, and nontraditional knowledge; and learning English.

Some researchers have focused on race differences in attrition rates, and others have determined that other factors may be operating. African Americans on predominately White campuses drop out more than their White counterparts (Loo & Rolison, 1995; and Suen, 1995); hence it is suggested that ethnic minorities experience alienation from the university, which in turn leads to stress and eventually attrition. Thus, minority status by itself may not be the key factor in attrition. (Cooke et al., 1995, para. 9)

A study conducted by E. S. W. Harrison (1997) of Black doctoral students in a predominantly White university revealed that one third of the graduates experienced race-related difficulties in their programs. He reported that these students were exposed to unfair treatment, underestimation of their abilities, exclusion, insults, and denial of opportunities. However, they were able to cope with these obstacles by sheer self-

determination, increased relationship with their peers, maintaining connectivity spiritually and socially, and a confidence in their abilities and self-worth.

O'Bara (1993) found that successful graduates rated their advisors very high on issues relating to research. However, male students rated advisors higher than did female students in their overall ratings. To a large extent, female doctoral students said that they would not select the same advisor again. Beeler (1993) suggested that demographic and socioeconomic population shifts would soon lead to increased student diversity. Faculty advisors should prepare and improve their advising techniques to meet the needs of this new wave of women, minority, and adult learners. This includes increasing the diversity of minority and women representation in the faculty, developing mentoring programs, and adjusting program relevancy to careers for "at risk" students (Wiemers, 1999).

Support for changes in advising techniques can be found from Solorzano's (1993) research of 66 Ford Foundation Minority Fellowship scholars. He reported that this group encountered educational obstacles involving lack of program information; inadequate preparation; shortage of role models; family responsibilities; affirmative action stigma; and racial and gender discrimination. This same group reported the benefits to positive mentoring and encouragement from individual faculty members, peers, and family.

Integration, Involvement and Interaction

In order to help students find the link between academic learning and practical experience, Bok (1986) recommended that formal practice and instruction were needed "to teach students to analyze different skills, understand their constituent elements, and comprehend how the elements function to achieve a desired result" (p. 106). Rogers (1969) highlighted the importance of learning by doing. "Placing the student in direct

experimental confrontation with practical problems, social problems, ethical and philosophical problems, personal issues, and research problems, is one of the most effective modes of promoting learning” (p. 162). According to Rogers, student learning is facilitated by their active involvement in the process. The “buy-in” is greater when students select their own direction for discovery, formulate their own issues and problems for investigation, and, above all, live with the results of their work.

In examining the influences of institutional structure and environment upon student development and integration, Pascarella suggested the following:

“Growth is a function of the direct and indirect effects of five major sets of variables. Two of those sets, students’ background and precollege characteristics and the structural and organizational features of the institution (for example, size, selectivity, residential character), together shape the third variable set: a college’s or university’s environment.

These three clusters of variables, in turn, influence a fourth cluster that involves both the frequency and content of students’ interactions with the major socializing agents on campus (the faculty and other students). Quality of effort, the fifth constellation of variables, is shaped by students’ background traits, by the general institutional environment, and by the normative influences of peers and faculty members. (as cited in Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 53)

Tinto (1987) demonstrated that the intensity of the interaction between students and the academic and social systems of the institutional program have a profound effect upon student success or failure. “The opportunities for involvement within the university for undergraduate students, while possibly extensive, may not be the most effective

method for improving involvement among graduate students” (Cooke et al., 1995, para. 35).

Family, Finance and Employment

In investigating attrition, Powles (1999) discovered that increased family concerns and responsibilities were a leading cause of student attrition. This included family illness, births, deaths, and marital separation or divorce. Family concerns and obligations are intertwined with many of the variables affecting student success or failure in the doctoral program. These variables include dealing with stress and anxiety; employment and finances; time-to-degree; interaction with the institution; relationships with advisors and committees; time devoted to research and writing; and individual motivation, persistence, or procrastination.

In their research of the costs (excluding tuition) of competing dissertation research, Cheatham et al. (1982) reported that the average doctoral candidate spent \$1,118.51. It is important to note that this research was done almost 20 years ago. At today’s dollar, the figure would at least be doubled and probably tripled.

Some doctoral candidates are fortunate to obtain grants, scholarships, or third-party backing to finance the dissertation phase of their program. But, all too often, the majority of ABDs attempt to bear the burden of research costs from their normal budget. Davis and Parker (1997) noted,

Students seem willing to borrow money and seek other financial aid for the period they are taking courses, but seem quite reluctant to take financial risks at the dissertation stage. From a logical standpoint, borrowing is most appropriate for the completion of the dissertation. (p. 7)

In examining the factors associated with student problems encountered while working on their doctorate, Dinham and Scott (1999b) found that financial difficulty was the leading factor mentioned by almost 60% of those surveyed. The same point was made by Abedi and Benkin (1987), who postulated that financial support was the most important factor contributing to the time taken to complete the doctorate. They found that doctoral students who supported themselves and family through off-campus employment took longer to complete their degrees. Conversely, those doctoral students who did not have to work off-campus, but received either financial aid or support (i.e., on-campus employment), were able to complete their programs more rapidly. The lengthier time to completion, due to the need to work full-time, was cited as a major factor in the success of doctorate attainment in the research conducted by Wahlstrom (1997).

Faculty, alumni, and ABDs continually highlight the detrimental effects of full-time job responsibilities upon progress towards completion of the dissertation. The pressures and demands of employment were found to be among the most significant factors to completing the dissertation by both completers and noncompleters of the program (Germeroth, 1991; Wright, 1991). “Almost inevitably the immediate demands of their paid employment became more pressing than the dissertation, and the dissertation was put off indefinitely” (Jacks et al., 1983, p. 77). Models developed by Boydston (1996), after examining 366 doctoral-granting institutions, show that finances are the overwhelming dominant issue affecting student progress towards the doctorate. Astin (1975) found similar adverse effects to student success from full-time or off-campus employment.

An interesting perspective on the time taken to complete the degree was postulated by Wilson (1965), who reported that, the longer students were employed before starting their program, the longer it took them to complete. The faster group completed their initial coursework on an average of 2 years, while the slower group (those with preemployment) took an average of 8 years to complete their coursework.

Stress and Anxiety

Student stress and anxiety during the dissertation phase of the doctoral program vary in intensity, depending on the factors at work. Time constraints, family obligations, perfectionism, finances, and advisor and committee conflicts are but a few of the issues that can raise the ABD's stress index and anxiety levels. Investigations into the effects of stress upon completion of the degree support the notion that, the more stressors, the less likely the program completion (Hales, 1998).

Individual students rarely acknowledge or recognize the stressors associated with the dissertation process. Although they may realize that they are becoming more short-tempered, irritable, and anxious, and are experiencing loss of sleep, they tend to associate the manifestations with the approaching conclusion of their program and not recognize that the increased stress upon themselves and family is caused by the research and writing of the dissertation. Cooke et al. (1995) stated,

Stress and lack of support from family and friends are potentially associated with the likelihood to drop out. Students who report feelings of great stress and those who do not have social support to encourage them to persevere may be more likely to drop out. (para. 13)

Wells (1982) wrote, “Others have described the checkpoints and hurdles necessarily encountered by all doctoral students who stick it out. The three years are an emotional binge: anxiety, affirmation, depression, euphoria, terror, and ecstasy. Most students have these feelings” (as cited in Vartuli, 1982, p. 111). Usually, a spouse, peer, close friend, or faculty member may be the first to recognize the symptoms of stress. They may be able to assist the student by recommending “a number of strategies: (1) improving study habits, (2) managing time wisely, (3) learning positive self-talk, (4) learning how to relax, and (5) joining a student support group” (Whitman, Spendlove, & Clark, 1986, p. 2). However, the prolonged affects of stress – unchecked or recognized – can lead to serious consequences.

Malaney’s (1988) literature review on stress and anxiety provides extensive data on the adverse effects of stress and the students’ ability to cope. In addition to becoming obstacles to dissertation completion (motivation, depression, self-worth, guilt, etc.) stress can put one into a high-risk category for illness (pp. 426-427). Responses from a two-page stress survey of 30 doctoral students in the College of Education at Ohio State University revealed overall agreement that stress influenced their ability to complete the program. Reacting to financial adjustments during the 1st year of study caused the most worry and stress. However, the single most stressful period was in preparation for the comprehensive exams. “Physical symptoms during this time included intestinal disorders, skin rashes, weight gain (20 pounds were reported gained by several woman), irregular menstrual cycles, nervousness, and lack of sleep” (Barnett, 1982, p. 65).

Monaghan (1989) suggested that students who have a more difficult time coping with the rise and fall of anxiety levels during the dissertation stage of the doctorate are those unable to maintain a close relationship with their advisor.

Many advisors, committee members, and other faculty can offer the support and sensitivity necessary to make the process one of gratification of specific skills and abilities, so that the prolonged frustration does not build over a period of time to symptoms of emotional and physical stress. (Barnett, 1982, p. 63)

Time Allocation and Topic Selection

In research conducted on 158 distance-learning doctoral students from Walden University, Scrubb (1998) discovered that students experienced a significant amount of stress while working towards degree completion. The greatest stressor was, time. The factors of employment, family commitment, persistence, motivation, financial support, and time to complete the degree are interconnected. The longer it takes to complete the degree, the larger the costs associated with tuition, fees, and books; the greater the demand upon the family life, the greater the likelihood to postpone project work. Similarly, the more hours one works per week, in full-time or part-time employment, the less time one has available for study and research, project development, interacting with one's family, along with the increased likelihood of procrastination. Subsequently, the less time devoted to full-time or part-time employment, the greater the need for financial aid and the greater the stress associated with the paying back of the loans. Of course, another major influence in this equation is the time restraints associated with completing the doctoral degree. Gillingham et al. (1991) described these determinants as "rational student choice" (p. 464).

In her research at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Civian (1990) reported that the average time to complete the entire doctoral program was 5.83 years. This time-to-degree increased significantly over the following 6 years. R. S. Myers (1999) reported that the averages increased to 7.2 years. The largest increases occurred in the humanities, social sciences, and education disciplines. The time-to-degree was also recognized as the strongest predictor of student success. This premise was also noted by Bair (1999) in her study of retention rates in 13 universities. She reported that, the longer doctoral students spent in the program, the greater their chances were not to persist to completion. “Research conducted by Porter and Wolfle (1991) indicated that the average time required to complete a dissertation was 9.5 full-time months” (as cited in Cuetara & LeCapitaine, 1991, p. 239). Their findings were substantiated several years later by Cuetara and LeCapitaine (1991), who found the average time to completion to be 10.15 years.

The pressures upon the ABD student seem to increase and intensify with the passing of time and approaching deadlines. Unfortunately, those postponing initiating their dissertation development soon find the task almost overwhelming and almost insurmountable. “Most experienced advisors find that a student’s early efforts to define a research problem are characterized by confusion and uncertainty both about the nature of the problem and how it might best be solved” (Bargar & Duncan, 1982, p. 17). Wilson (1965) found from his research that “there is marked variability among individuals in regard to the timing of initiation of dissertation research in relation to completion of other degree requirements, and in speed of completion of the dissertation thereafter” (p. 169).

Students often experience periods of “writer’s block” during the development of their proposal or writing the dissertation. This may occur when deciding upon a topic of research, defining research questions, or at any stage along the way towards completion. Cohen (1998) suggested that rigors of research and writing the dissertation differ greatly from the requirements, expectations, and support found in previous writing experiences. There are times when students believe they are experiencing writer’s block, when, in fact, they are experiencing a phase of development, reflection, and “ripening” of ideas. This pause in written productivity may raise the student anxiety levels and develop into writer’s block.

Many students quickly encounter difficulties in deciding upon a topic for study or developing research questions. “Such confusion and uncertainty in thought is likely to be accompanied at times by emotional reactions of anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and loss of confidence” (Bargar & Duncan, 1982, p. 18). S. Isaac and Michael (1995) identified several common mistakes graduate students make in formulating a research study. The number-one item was postponing topic selection until finishing all or most of the coursework. The second most notable problem was accepting the first topic that they thought of or was suggested to them. The third mistake was selecting a topic that was so massive and convoluted, which if attempted, could never be completed (p. 35). Lawton (1997) referred to those who select a topic too vast or complex to be meaningful, as the “magnum opus” type of doctoral student (as cited in Graves & Varma, 1997, p. 8).

In examining the ideal time to begin work on a dissertation, Cheatham et al. (1982) wrote that 87% of respondents felt that doctoral students should start work during

the coursework stage of study, while only 12% of respondents indicated that students should wait until all coursework was completed. Although the topic of inquiry may be selected prior to completion of the comprehensive exams, most “doctoral students commonly wait until they have completed all requirements except the dissertation before seriously considering the dissertation topic” (Davis & Parker, 1997, p. 49).

An investigation of 438 doctoral graduates revealed that 40% of education majors (52% of all majors) actually selected their topic of inquiry before completion of the comprehensive exams; the remaining 60% (48% of all majors) waited until after reaching the ABD level (P. D. Isaac et al., 1989). The later work conducted by P. D. Isaac et al. (1992) of 596 graduating Ph.D. students found that 70% of education majors (80% of all majors) selected topics before completing comprehensive exams.

Preparedness and Research Skills

Wilson (1965) identified several factors related to student completion of the dissertation: (a) choosing a topic outside one’s nature and scope of knowledge, one which was unclear and out of focus; (b) delaying start of the research project by procrastinating or taking a break in the program; (c) being unprepared and lacking knowledge of library and research resources; (d) having inadequate research experience; and (e) possessing an inability to organize and write up the results of research (p. 44).

Student preparedness for conducting intense research for the dissertation is a concern to all parties involved in the process: the student, the advisor, the committee, the university, and the community in general. Dixon and Peltier (1991) and Heiss (1967) reported that many doctoral candidates are inadequately prepared to collect and analyze the experimental research data obtained during the dissertation stage of their program.

Many students have attended only introductory statistics courses and are not able to run statistical analysis computer programs, such as Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) or Statistical Analysis System (SAS). Subsequently, many of these students lose confidence and resort to having the statistics done by a computing center or other students.

Briggs (1986) suggested that “a systematic data collection should be guided by systematic examination of the best methods for conducting research on the chosen problem in the society in question” (p. 98). Defining the best methods of data collection can be a difficult task, especially for students who are knowledge deficient in their research skills. Many students, especially part-time students, are unwilling to take research courses. They argue the relevancy of such courses and feel their time should be devoted to required coursework (Graves, 1997). In some instances, due to employment obligations or distance from campus, a few students find it difficult to gain access to resources (Pinson, 1997).

Madsen (1992) found the following:

The syndrome that produces the A.B.D. is less likely to afflict the candidate who is well prepared, who understands what is expected of him [or her] at each stage of the degree program, and who knows how to go about researching and writing the thesis. (p. xi)

Those who viewed the aspects of the dissertation process as being within their control were more likely to complete the work than those who felt they had no control over the process (Mariano, 1993).

Writing and Structure

Fitzpatrick, Secrist, and Wright (1998) whimsically proclaimed that “writing the dissertation is guaranteed to reduce former academic confidence levels to quivering attacks of feeling ‘educationally challenged’” (p. xi). The point is that student preparedness in writing the proposal and dissertation is often lacking. The process, requirements, format, and structure are far removed from writing position papers during the standard coursework phases of their program or producing articles for publication or presentation. Actual formal preparation for this work may be available from the university in the form of a dissertation research course or research seminar, which is dedicated to assisting students develop their research proposal. These courses are intended to “bridge the gap between theory and practice” (Texas Tech University, 2000, p. 104). Regrettably, these courses are usually optional and are sometimes overlooked or passed over by doctoral students in their pursuit to complete required coursework.

Writing anxiety was shown to be a factor to doctoral dissertation completion by Bloom (1981). She found that the students’ previous academic and experience did not adequately prepare ABDs for the rigors of proposal and dissertation completion. Bako-Okolo (1996) explained that many doctoral candidates were adept in completing the literature review of their dissertation, but far less prepared for analyzing the data or completing the research design. O’Bara (1993) explained that many doctoral candidates felt unprepared to tackle the rigors of intensive research and the prolonged planning, construction, and formulation of placing their synthesized thoughts on paper. Many students abandon the dissertation after realizing their inability to merge their learned knowledge and research into a final body of work.

The Association for Support of Graduate Students (2000c) described the pressing need for better writing:

Advisors are concerned about quality of writing, knowing their reputations go online with the dissertations they chair. But few programs, with the exception of English departments, offer doctoral coursework in writing and editing. This is despite the fact students in most fields don't write at a professional level and don't know how to copy-edit beyond basic grammar and organization. Until such instruction becomes common, students are, for the most part, on their own to fine-tune their dissertations. (para. 7)

Kluever (1997a) suggested that many ABDs need more guidance and structure to bridge the gap between the structured coursework to the less structured dissertation phase of the doctoral program. In comparing dissertation completers to noncompleters, he found student support for increased structure in the dissertation stage of the doctoral program. These suggestions included adding dissertation proposal writing, compiling student support groups for those working on the proposal and dissertation, providing guidance on how to choose a major professor and committee, managing time, and establishing and maintaining quality communications with their committee.

In a study conducted by Bauer (1997) at UCLA, 342 Ph.D. candidates, 95 Ph.D. graduates, and 193 dissertation advisors were asked to rate the level of satisfaction with the dissertation structure. The data revealed that a major factor in slowing down the time to obtain the degree was associated with service as a teaching or research assistant. An interesting note to this work was the results of Lovitts's (1997a) study on attrition. She found that "people who dropped out were less likely to have had teaching or research

assistantships than their peers who earned degrees” (para. 5). The inference from the work by Lovitts (1997a) and Bauer (1997) show the value of one’s interaction with the institution as a teaching or research assistant. The time to completion of the degree may be lengthened, but the success is increased.

Procrastination, Persistence, and Motivation

Procrastination is another obstacle in the doctoral candidate’s path towards completing the dissertation requirement. The transition from the standard classroom environment of coursework to the isolation of self-directed dissertation research takes its toll on many students (Simpson, 1986). Some students elect to take well-deserved time off before starting their dissertation, whereas others may feel unprepared or uncertain about what they are to do and how they will go about it. The result is the same--the project initiation is postponed.

The more time taken to complete the degree, especially after one becomes an ABD, can have a negative impact on both the student and the university. The students’ competitiveness in the job market diminishes, their morale tends to decline, and their persistence to finish the work dwindles. The university has a different set of issues to contend with involving program attractiveness to prospective students and restrictions on the number of new students allowed to enter the program (Weil, 1990). Of course, “the most serious possible consequence of a delay in completion is that the doctoral dissertation will never be written and the doctorate will never be attained” (Davis & Parker, 1997, p. 6).

In a study conducted with professors from the University Council for Educational Administration, Berry (1994) revealed that the most important variables limiting or

adversely affecting student success were associated with goal setting, individual student persistence, working full time, and coping with pressures from family obligations.

Frasier (1994) concluded that student persistence and feelings towards graduate work were directly related to the support, guidance, and direction received from their program department. Faculty advisors generally view the students' increased program involvement as a positive action, which can easily lead to increased faculty and advisor interaction and support (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988). Girves and Wemmerus stated, "Involvement in one's program is directly related to doctoral degree progress" (p. 185). This viewpoint was substantiated almost a decade later by Lovitts (1997b). Her research revealed profound differences in structures and opportunities available to students for departmental academic and social systems integration. Degree completers were those who were participators in departmental formal and informal development opportunities and who were involved in activities beyond required coursework.

According to Karolyi (1994), student persistence was essential to completing the dissertation. She suggested that success in this phase could be enhanced significantly by fostering a sound professional relationship between the advisor and advisee. This active relationship should be a joint effort by the advisor and advisee. The National Science Foundation (1999) commented that the academic and professional interaction between faculty and student strongly affected persistence. The positive interaction between doctoral students, their peers, faculty, and the program improve the overall educational experience, making it much more than acquiring a diploma (Harbold, 1988).

In The Doctorate: Talking About the Degree, Dinham and Scott (1999a) found that the leading personal qualities for successful doctoral degree completion were

tenacity and perseverance. This view of student persistence was expressed by 91% of their survey respondents. Dorn et al. (1995) made the point that the lack of persistence and motivation positioned the student on a course towards reduced support and encouragement from group members and peers.

Student persistence to complete the doctorate can be enhanced through a more active intellectual involvement in the academic and social life of the university (Faghihi & Ethington, 1996). Increased student involvement equates to greater satisfaction in the overall academic experience (Nielson, 1998). In their research to find convergence between two major theories of college persistence, Cabrera et al. (1992), found the following:

Bean's (1982) Student Attrition Model and Tinto's (1987) Student Integration Model are correct in presuming that college persistence is the product of a complex set of interactions among personal and institutional factors as well as presuming that Intent to Persist is the outcome of the successful match between the student and the institution. (p. 158)

Dorn et al. (1995) analyzed group cohesiveness and student persistence motivators and purported a link to graduate studies from Astin's (1985) "theory of involvement" and Tinto's (1987) Student Integration Model. They found that educators who "work together as a team earning doctorates benefit from the experience, share those benefits with their workplaces, and most importantly, tend to find the motivation to complete their doctorates" (p. 305).

Student motivation can be adversely affected in several ways, some internal and some external. Certainly settling upon a dissertation topic and research question is a

hurdle that must be overcome in the initial stages. Students face many other difficulties in their quest towards completion of the dissertation. Some are defined by Davis and Parker (1997):

The project does not go as planned

Momentum is lost

Discouragement and depression

Writer's block

Someone else publishes the same research

The dissertation is rejected. (p. 130)

In a study examining faculty attitudes towards doctoral students, McFarland (1995) explained that the faculty expects doctoral students to initiate contact, be assertive, independent, and committed. Generally, faculty members do not accept responsibility for their advisees' lack of progress. Bauer's (1997) research at UCLA of 342 Ph.D. candidates, 95 Ph.D. graduates, and 193 dissertation advisors concluded that lack of personal motivation was a primary reason for noncompletion of the dissertation.

Peer and Social Support

Stalker (1991) wrote, "There is only one group more isolated than people who are writing their dissertation; that is people who should be writing their dissertation" (p. 56). Dissertation support groups can help avoid this isolation and be a valuable resource to doctoral candidates; they can help members stay focused and work towards the common goal of completing the dissertation (Stalker, 1991).

The support and guidance obtained from this peer group can help students cope with the anxieties, pressures, and problems encountered during their program. While the

major advisor can advise on research design, topic selection, formation of research questions, dealing with writer's block, establishing goals and timetables, and a multitude of other topics, the peer support group can offer advice and consolation for the student who is dealing with internal feelings of frustration, disillusionment, isolationism, insecurity, anger, confusion, self-doubt, disenchantment, inadequacy, loss of confidence, and a feeling of generally being overwhelmed. Monsour and Corman (1991) wrote, "In sum, individuals writing dissertations need support beyond that which is provided by advisors and committees. . . . The ideal source of support is from someone who is actually going through the dissertation process at the same time" (p. 182). Barnett (1982) reported, "The most consistent support mentioned by female students was that of other female students in the program (as cited in Vartuli, 1982, p. 66).

Monaghan (1989) found a viable reason to sanction support groups from his analysis of doctoral student counseling: "The slowest students had no relationships with others. And, while often given to helping others, they did not seek help themselves for fear of feeling vulnerable" (para. 11). Gell (1995) surmised that the mutual concerns and exchanges between students could best be accomplished in dissertation support groups. She suggested that dissertation advising handbooks, describing major milestones and requirements for limiting topic selection and developing the proposal, could be helpful to ABDs in completing the final phase of the program.

Advisors and Committees

One of the most overwhelming variables in completing the doctoral dissertation stage is the relationship between the student and his or her advisor and committee. The time spent during their encounters may involve "both pleasant and unpleasant

experiences” (Goulden, 1991, p. 46). The Association for Support of Graduate Students (2000b) offered ABDs sage advice about this relationship: “Problems with your research can be frustrating, but problems with your advisor can be fatal to your degree” (para.1).

Astin (1971) found from his research on the college environment that “the administrator who wishes to utilize these results in changing his [or her] environment may be hindered by the fact that he [or she] does not have complete control over it” (p. 131). This statement is applicable to both the advisor and advisee in their relationship during the dissertation phase:

Should the relationship between student and advisor be closer than it is? In a study some years ago, it was reported that 80% of all graduate faculty and recent recipients of the Ph.D. degree were satisfied with the closeness of the relationship (Berelson, 1960, p. 179). In the matter of advice, Heiss (1970, p. 153) found that most of the 3,000 graduate students she studied were satisfied with their relationship with their thesis advisor; however, 6% reported that advisors gave too much direction, and 28% said they gave too little. It is, unquestionably, a difficult balance to strike. Of additional interest, by the way, is the fact that 82% reported that their advisers expected the candidate to take the initiative in arranging meetings to discuss matters of concern. (Madsen, 1992, p. 16)

Heiss (1970) found that “the quality and character of the relationship between the doctoral student and his major professor is unequivocally the most sensitive and crucial element in the doctoral experience” (p. 151). Campbell (1992) and Bako-Okolo (1996) stated that the strength of this relationship is most critical during the dissertation stage. This is the time when the student is most in need of positive encouragement, guidance,

support, and mentoring by the advisor. In support of this premise, Faghihi et al. (1999) observed that student dissertation progress was significantly enhanced through a positive relationship with the advisor. Just as importantly, their research showed this to be applicable to all students, despite their race, sex, age, financial status, or time within the program. Campbell (1992) discovered that successful doctoral candidates attributed part of their accomplishment to their strong rapport with their advisor, in his examination of doctoral student completion and noncompletion at the University of Delaware. Conversely, unsuccessful ABDs felt that a stronger relationship with their advisor would have helped them achieve their goal.

Cheatham et al. (1982) found that, for the most part, students are “generally satisfied with their advisors’ supervision” (p. 318). They reported:

Fifty-seven percent were very satisfied, thirty-two percent were satisfied, six percent were neutral, four percent expressed dissatisfaction, and only one percent were very dissatisfied. Reasons for dissatisfaction ranged from unclear expectations to an unsupportive attitude. Thirteen percent of the respondents reported that their advisor did not know enough about their research area, nine percent claimed the expectations were unclear or inconsistent; eight percent reported that their advisors did not spend enough time with them; four percent indicated their advisors were not prescriptive enough, and three percent claimed the advisors’ attitude was not helpful or supportive. (p. 319)

The National Science Foundation (1999) found in their Workshop on Graduate Student Attrition that student time to degree could be reduced if their progress were monitored more closely and regularly by faculty advisors. Research by Bauer (1997) and

Bloom (1981) recommended that faculty advisors encourage advisees to set goals, milestones, and time schedules in working towards completion of the dissertation. Golde (1994) concluded that student persistence and success could increase, provided they received active intervention from the department and more caring and nurturing support from advisors. A caring and positive attitude on the part of the advisor is paramount to developing mutual respect and productive relationship between the advisor and advisee (Bargar & Mayo-Chamberlain, 1983; Hales, 1998). Additionally, this increase in advisor-advisee communication could identify and possibly eliminate some of the more common inhibitors or obstacles to student completion of the dissertation, such as writer's block; picking a viable and exciting topic; coping with financial issues; full-time employment; goal commitment/establishing timetables; and working through family and personal problems.

Selection and Mentoring

Levi (1969) portrayed the ideal university: "They have inculcated an appreciation for the works of the mind, developed the skills of the intellect, emphasized the continuing need for free inquiry and discussion, the importance of scientific discovery, the need to understand the nonrational" (p. 169). Advisors and committees have this same charge in mentoring and guiding doctoral students through the dissertation process. Their viewpoints describing these obstacles are indispensable in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the ABD phenomena (McFarland, 1995).

Lees (1997) observed that students tended to choose dissertation advisors who had similar interests and values, and those with whom they had a previous relationship. Davis and Parker (1997) offered doctoral candidates some factors to take into account

when choosing an advisor. This includes their (a) past performance with other candidates, (b) interest in competence in topic area or research methodology, (c) personality and personal characteristics, and (d) response characteristics (p. 46). Another factor to consider is the advisors' experience in the profession. A study conducted at the Louisiana State University and Agriculture and Mechanical College by Cooper (1997) on doctoral advisors from the University Council for Vocational Education found the advisors' professional experience to have the greatest impact on student completion rates. The impact of the advisors on student completion was the focus of a study conducted by Schwarz (1998). She found student progress affected by the values of the advisor, frequency of their meetings and communications, and support from the advisor to help the student complete his or her program.

The selection of the doctoral committee is equally important, and their competence and interest characteristics can help or hinder the doctoral student's progress. "Two major criteria for selection are the assistance a proposed committee member is likely to provide to the candidate and the advisor's feeling as to how the proposed committee member will function in the committee" (Davis & Parker, 1997, p. 47). Madsen (1992) asserted that the research advisor will often be more aware of the "petty feuds and personality conflicts that bedevil many departments" (p. 16). Gardner & Beatty (1980) recommended that students try to select committee members who get along with each other and are interested in the topic of research.

What their advisor and committee members expect from the doctoral student may offer some insight into why conflicts and troubles occur between them. Advisors and committee members generally want a candidate (a) who will do a good dissertation in a

reasonable time that they can be proud to sign; (b) who shows initiative, but accepts guidance and follows through on suggestions; (c) who is organized, uses the committee's time effectively, and is also reasonable in the demands on their time; and (d) who has personal integrity. (Davis & Parker, 1997, p. 47)

Mentoring involves a continuous series of goal setting, periodic maintenance, and redirection to assure accomplishment of the task. Preestablished communication avenues and routine meetings are essential in facilitating a strong professional and collegial relationship between the advisor and advisee. Filippelli's (1997) study involving mentoring and gender differences reported that the career-enhancing mentoring advice provided by the major professor was found to be more important to women than to men.

Summary

Research has concentrated on identifying the issues and variables associated with attrition at the graduate and doctoral levels. These include correlation studies of age, race, and gender; academic advisement and mentoring; employment; family support and obligations; financial assistance; integration, involvement, and interaction with the institution; peer and social support groups; personality variables of motivation, persistence, and procrastination; research and writing skills of the student; program structure; stress; time-to-degree; and topic selection. However, the data from the majority of these works have not provided an understanding of how the ABD phenomenon develops and progresses during the dissertation phase of study. Nor does the research provide an insight into how these obstacles were overcome by successful dissertation completers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Description of the Population

The participants for this project were selected from doctoral candidates and past graduates from the Higher Education Program in a College of Education. The program currently offers a doctor of education (Ed.D.) with a major in higher education and is in the final stages of obtaining approval from The Higher Education Coordinating Board to expand the program to include the doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.).

The population for this study consisted of current ABDs, previously attrited ABDs, and graduates in a Higher Education Doctoral Program who were admitted to doctoral candidacy from 1991 through July 2000. Students who had not reached this level by the time of sample selection were not included in the survey.

The actual numbers of students surveyed within these three groups were 101; this did not include two students who had died since becoming ABD. These groups consisted of adults from approximately 25 to over 60 years of age; the group included both male and female students; ethnic backgrounds were varied; and their marital status was within the norms for their age groups. The age, sex, ethnicity, or marital status of the participants were not factors in selection for participation or rejection from this study.

Research Method

The qualitative approach for this project was chosen to focus “on the meaning of events and actions as expressed by the participants” (McMillan, 1996, p. 241).

Qualitative research and research questionnaires provide for richer insight into the issues associated with factors to completing the dissertation process. Fitzpatrick et al. (1998) felt that the “beauty of qualitative data is in reading and rereading and physically manipulating the data, in discovering those little nuances, those pearls of wisdom your participants have orally bestowed upon you” (p. 116).

The research conducted by Lawrence H. Myers, who used the research questionnaire in ethnographic format, sought responses from participants in face-to-face interviews. This methodology allowed the participants to respond spontaneously to questioning and to elaborate on key issues when they felt it necessary. The drawback to this method of data gathering was low participation. Myers found only 11 students willing to participate in his research study.

The intention of this study was to expand Myers’s work by increasing the population sample to include all ABD students, whether successful, unsuccessful, or in progress of the dissertation stage. Therefore, the scope of the study was expanded to seek a broader view of possible obstacles to completing the dissertation.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study consisted of a 20-item questionnaire developed by the researcher and through the contributions (questions 14, 15, 16, and 18) of Lawrence H. Myers (Appendix F). Ten of these 20 questions were open-ended, allowing respondents the opportunity of providing more indepth reactions in their responses than could have been obtained by merely a Likert-type scale.

Demographic information Questions 1 through 4 were derived from a variety of research studies (Emerson, 1998; Gell, 1995; Huguley, 1989; Myers, 1999; O’Bara,

1993). Faculty members from the research study institution sought responses to Questions 5, 6, 7, 10, 19, and 20. Cohen's (1998) writer's block research provided the foundation for Question 8. Myers's (1999) questionnaire provided the basis for Questions 9, 11, 12, and 13, and the research studies of Emerson (1998), Hales (1998), Huguley (1989), and O'Bara (1993) enabled more precise question development. Question 17 was developed from the research by O'Bara (1993) and refined as a result of feedback from the pilot study.

Questions were grouped into a logical sequence that solicited responses to questions encompassing influences and impressions relating to their own preparedness; advisor and committee interaction; personal and family aspects; financing of the degree; employment factors; and other impediments affecting the completion of the doctoral program. "This type of interview fit the needs of the researcher to explore for information pertaining to the doctoral experience, and permitted the participants to tell their stories" (L. H. Myers, 1999, p. 31).

Pilot and Previous Study

The content validity and reliability of the research questionnaire were found to be consistent through the pilot testing of the instrument. The first pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted with a group of previous Higher Education Doctoral Program graduates. Results from this initial study enabled the researcher to refine the directions, eliminate duplication, combine similar questions, and restructure the question sequence. A second pilot study was conducted with a group of 6 current and previous ABD students, as well as past graduates from a Higher Education Doctoral Program. Results from the second pilot study found consistency in completion times and responses.

Only minor punctuation and syntax changes were made to the finalized instrument to facilitate ease of reading and response. None of the pilot test participants was included in the final survey.

Incorporated questions (14, 15, 16, and 18) from the L. H. Myers (1999) questionnaire were also pilot tested on a small group of doctoral graduate students and field tested with a larger population of doctoral students from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's doctoral program in educational leadership. Approval for use of this questionnaire may be found in Appendix E.

Data Collection Procedure

A request was made to, and approved by, the Coordinator for the Higher Education Program in the College of Education to conduct the dissertation research at his institution (Appendix A). A comprehensive listing of past and present ABD students and graduated students from this program was compiled using data from a multitude of sources within the university. This included graduate office records, registrar enrollment records, dissertation advisor records and memories, qualifying exam completion records, Doctoral Review and Summary Reports sent to the Higher Education Coordinating Board, class rosters, alumni directory, ex-students associations, and doctoral graduation programs. The faculty in the Higher Education Doctoral Program assisted the researcher by reviewing names of prospective study participants and deleting names of students who did not meet the criteria described above. A final review of current students who had completed their qualifying/comprehensive exams during the month of July 2000 was added to complete the final list of 101 participants used in the investigation. Mailing

addresses for the completed participants list were provided by the Higher Education Program Office.

Formal approval from the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board (Appendix B) was requested and obtained before contacting ABD students. Subsequently, students on the completed participants list were sent a Letter of Purpose (Appendix D) requesting their participation in the research study; the approved University of North Texas Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects Research Consent Form (Appendix C); Questionnaire/Survey Instrument (Appendix F); and a return preaddressed and stamped envelope.

Questionnaires were color coded to distinguish among those who dropped out of the program, currently enrolled doctoral candidates, and past graduates. Additionally, each questionnaire and return envelope was annotated with alphanumeric symbols corresponding to a master list of participants, such as “C,” “P,” or “G,” followed by a number indicating their alphabetical position (i.e., C-001, for current student 1; P-005 symbolizing previous student 5; or G-007 for graduated student 7). The surveys for all participants were identical, with the exception of the paper color “ivory” for current ABDs, “buff” for previous ABDs, and “yellow” for graduated or Ed.D.’s. After 10 days, 67 nonrespondents were sent a second package of materials. This included a follow-up letter of purpose and identical materials as in the first mailings. After an additional 10 day period, the remaining nonrespondents were sent a final letter and package requesting their participation. All surveys received up until the final drafting of this dissertation were included.

Data Management/Analysis

Data collected on the survey instrument were categorized into tables and charts manually by the researcher. The 20 survey questions and subquestions of (1) Age, (2) Gender, (3) Ethnicity, (4) Marital Status, (5) Institutional Involvement, (6) Peer Support Group Participation, (7) Value of Research Seminar, (8) Experiences in Writer's Block, (9) Factors (26 items) Influencing Degree Progress, (10) Changes to Dissertation Committee, (11) Relationship With Dissertation Chair, (12) Relationship With Dissertation Committee, (13) Employment, Financial, or Personal Factors (19 items) Adversely Affecting Progress, (14) Family Support, (15) Family Commitments, (16) Personal Obligations, (17) Financing the Degree, (18) Employer Support, (19) Ideas for a Better Experience, and (20) Other Factors Affecting Degree Progress, were tabulated, converted to percentages, and put into table format. Open-ended responses to these questions were reported in narrative form. The data are organized around the following five research questions guiding the study:

Research Question 1

What are the perceived doctoral program factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students? The purpose of this question was to ascertain trends, commonalities, and issues associated with the actual doctoral degree program, which may have influenced student degree progress.

Research Question 2

What are the perceived committee advisement factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students? The focus of this

question was to identify the perceived quality and quantity of the doctoral dissertation committee and chair involvement, which may have helped or hindered student progress.

Research Question 3

What are the perceived personal factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students? The purpose of this question was to identify the positive or negative influences of the personal factors (internal or external), including family commitments and obligations, which may have influenced dissertation progress.

Research Question 4

What are the perceived financial factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students? The intent of this question was to obtain data relating to the students' financing of the degree and to discover any financial factors that may have helped or hindered student progress.

Research Question 5

What are the perceived employment factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students? The purpose of this question was to identify the positive or negative employment factors encountered that may have influenced student degree progress.

In summary, Table 1 shows the relationship between the five research questions and the 20 survey instrument questions and subquestion items.

Table 1

Relationship of Research Questions and Survey Instrument Questions/Items

<u>Research questions</u>	<u>Survey instrument questions/items</u>
1	5, 6, 7, 8, 9 (l, r, t, v, w, x, y, z), 13 (l)
2	9 (a, b, e, f), 10, 11, 12
3	9 (c, d, h, i, k, m, n, o, p, q, s, u), 13 (d, e, i, j, m, n, q, r), 14, 15, 16
4	9 (j), 13 (a, c, h, p), 17
5	9 (g), 13 (b, f, g, k, o), 18

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the demographic and personal results collected from the survey instrument, discusses and interprets the results from the study data, makes recommendations, and offers suggestions for further research. Survey results of the qualitative analysis are organized under the associated seven categories: demographic characteristics of the participants, doctoral program factors, committee advisement factors, personal factors, relevant financial factors, employment factors, and other factors affecting degree progress.

Results of the Study

Research Question 1: What are the perceived doctoral program factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?

The perceived doctoral program factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students reported by at least 50% of respondents included Research Skills (87.3%), Writing Skills (87.3%), Topic Selection (77.8%), the Higher Education Research Seminar Course (EDHE 6310) (58.7%), Program Requirements (58.7%), and Time-to-Degree (50.8%).

Additionally, the Commute to the University (38.2%), Writer's Block (38.1%), Support Groups -- outside academia (38.1%), Involvement within the University

(30.2%), Institutional Involvement (28.6%), and Support Groups -- in academia (22.2%) were believed to be pertinent factors influencing dissertation progress.

Research Question 2: What are the perceived committee advisement factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?

The perceived committee advisement factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students reported by at least 50% of respondents included Relationship With Dissertation Chair (93.6% positive), Committee Chair (92.1%), Relationship With Dissertation Committee (90.5% positive), Committee - other than Chair (81.0%), Academic Advisement (69.8%), and Changes to Dissertation Committee (52.4%).

Additionally, Academic Mentoring (49.2%) was believed to be a pertinent factor influencing dissertation progress.

Research Question 3: What are the perceived personal factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?

The perceived personal factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students reported by at least 50% of respondents were: Motivation (90.5%), Family Support of Doctoral Study (96.8%), Family Support (88.9%), Persistence (82.6%), Stress (68.3%), Family Obligations (65.1%), Family Commitments (65.0%), Perfectionism (60.3%), Personal Obligations (57.1%), Other Obligations (54.8%), Age (53.9%), and Anxiety (50.8%).

Additionally, the factors of Procrastination (47.7%), Family Obligations (46.0%), Stress/Anxiety (36.5%), and Gender (20.6%) were believed to be pertinent factors influencing dissertation progress.

Research Question 4: What are the perceived financial factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?

The perceived financial factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students reported by at least 50% of respondents included financing their degree through full-time employment (87.8%).

Additionally, Financial Assistance (39.7%), Part-time Employment (23.8%), Cost of the Doctorate (19.0%), Other Financial Options (19.0%), and Financial Aid (17.5%) were believed to be pertinent factors influencing dissertation progress.

Research Question 5: What are the perceived employment factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?

The perceived employment factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students reported by at least 50% of respondents were: Employer Supportiveness (96.8%), Employment (84.1%), and Demands of the Job (55.6%)

Additionally, Work-Related Travel (23.8%) was believed to be a pertinent factor influencing dissertation progress.

Summary of Survey Returns

Table 2 summarizes the survey response rate from the study sample consisting of 101 participants. Questionnaires were sent to 23 current ABD, 10 previously attrited ABD students, and 68 past graduates from the Higher Education Doctoral Program from 1991 through July 2000. Of the 101 survey instruments distributed, 53 were returned on the first mailing. From this number, 8 surveys were returned with incorrect addresses; 2 of these included forwarding addresses from the U.S. Postal Service; 45 participants

returned the questionnaires completed, and the remaining 48 did not respond. Ten days following the initial mailing of surveys, a second distribution was conducted to the previous 48 nonrespondents, and 2 returned packages. As in the first mailing, this included (a) follow-up Letter of Purpose (Appendix D), (b) Questionnaire, (c) Research Consent Form, and (d) a preaddressed stamped return envelope. From this second mailing, 11 participants returned questionnaires completed, 2 surveys were returned with incorrect addresses, and the remaining 37 did not respond. A third and final request for participation was sent to the second group of 37 nonrespondents. This final request produced an additional 7 completed surveys. The three mailings to 101 potential participants produced the following results: 63 returned and completed surveys; 8 postal-returned surveys with no forwarding address; and 30 unreturned surveys from those choosing not to participate in this project. Therefore, the sample group for data collection was 63 (15 current ABDs, 4 previously attrited ABDs, and 44 graduated Ed.D.'s), or 67.8 % of the original 101 potential participants. In summary, Table 2 depicts data on the population sample, returned surveys with incorrect addresses, adjusted samples, respondents, nonrespondents, and response rates based on total and adjusted samples.

Table 2

Population, Sample, and Survey Response Rate of ABDs and Graduated Participants in the Study

Category	Current (Active ABDs)	Previous (Attrited ABDs)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s)	Row Totals
1. Population Sample	23	10	68	101
2. Surveys Returned with Incorrect Address	1	3	4	8
3. Adjusted Sample (1) – (2)	22	7	64	93
4. Respondents	15	4	44	63
5. Nonrespondents	7	3	20	30
6. Response Rate Based on Total Sample (4) / (1)	65.2%	40%	64.7%	62.4%
7. Response Rate Based on Adjusted Sample (4) / (3)	68.2%	57.1%	68.8%	67.8%

Note. Table format derived from S. K. Gell, (1995, p. 105).

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participant responses to survey Questions 1 through 4 were analyzed to provide information on four demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, and marital status).

Survey Questions 1 and 2. Survey responses to Question 1, as shown in Table 3, revealed that the age for students entering the dissertation portion of the higher education program ranged from less than 30 to over 60. The largest group, 57.1% ($n=36$) was found within the 40-49 age category. This group was followed by the 30-39 age category, 20.6% ($n=13$); the 50-59 age group, 12.7% ($n=8$); the 21-29 age group, 6.3% ($n=4$); and lastly by the 60+ age group, 3.2% ($n=2$). Therefore, 77.7% ($n=49$) of the responding participants surveyed were encompassed the 30-49 age-group categories.

Table 4 shows the numbers of male and female respondents. The data revealed that the majority of responding students (63.5%, $n=40$) were female, and 75% ($n=30$) of these were graduated Ed.D.'s. Male participants encompassed 36.5% ($n=23$) of the sample, and 60.9% were also categorized as graduates. In compiling the frequency count of males and females within each of the "age" categories, the data revealed that 80% ($n=32$) of the 40 female students and 82.6% ($n=19$) of the 23 male students were in the 30-49 age-group category.

Table 3

Question 1: What Was Your Age When Starting the Dissertation Portion of Your Doctoral Program?

Age	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
21-29	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (6.3%)	4 (6.3%)
30-39	7 (11.1%)	0 (0%)	6 (9.5%)	13 (20.6%)
40-49	7 (11.1%)	2 (3.2%)	27 (42.9%)	36 (57.1%)
50-59	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.2%)	5 (7.9%)	8 (12.7%)
60+	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	2 (3.2%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Table 4

Question 2: What Is Your Gender?

Gender	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Male	7 (11.1%)	2 (3.2%)	14 (22.2%)	23 (36.5%)
Female	8 (12.7%)	2 (3.2%)	30 (47.6%)	40 (63.5%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 3. Table 5 shows the range of responses to ethnicity. The overwhelming majority of survey respondents were Caucasian, 93.6% (n=59). Hispanic, 3.2% (n=2), Asian, 1.6% (n=1), and Native American, 1.6% (n=1) participants followed this category with minimal representation. There were no African American respondents. The actual frequency of males and females within these ethnic categories was 35 female and 24 male Caucasians; 2 female Hispanics; 1 female Asian; and 1 female Native American.

Table 5 also shows that the largest representation (65.1%, n=41) from the Caucasian category were “Graduated” students.

Table 5

Question 3: What Is Your Ethnic Background?

Ethnicity	Current (Active ABDs)		Previous (Attrited ABDs)		Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s)		Row Totals	
	<u>n</u>	(%)	<u>n</u>	(%)	<u>n</u>	(%)	<u>n</u>	(%)
African American	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Asian	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	1	(1.6%)	1	(1.6%)
Hispanic	1	(1.6%)	0	(0%)	1	(1.6%)	2	(3.2%)
Native American	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	1	(1.6%)	1	(1.6%)
Caucasian	14	(22.2%)	4	(6.3%)	41	(65.1%)	59	(93.6%)
Other	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Column totals	15	(23.8%)	4	(6.4%)	44	(69.8%)	63	(100%)

Survey Question 4. As shown in Table 6, married participants encompassed the largest representation, with 69.8% ($n=44$). This majority representation was followed by the remaining 30.2% of those classifying themselves as “divorced” (14.3%, $n=9$); “single, never married” (7.9%, $n=5$); and “separated” (4.8%, $n=3$) or “widowed” (3.2%, $n=2$).

Table 6

Question 4: How Would You Describe Your Marital Status During the Dissertation Portion of Your Doctoral Program?

Marital status	Current (Active ABDs) n (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) n (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) n (%)	Row Totals n (%)
Single, never married	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.8%)	5 (7.9%)
Married	11 (17.5%)	2 (3.2%)	31 (49.2%)	44 (69.8%)
Separated	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.2%)	3 (4.8%)
Divorced	2 (3.2%)	1 (1.6%)	6 (9.5%)	9 (14.3%)
Widowed	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	2 (3.2%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Doctoral Program Factors

This section addresses survey responses applicable to Research Question 1: What are the perceived doctoral program factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?

Survey Question 5. As shown in Table 7, the largest cluster of respondents, 44.4% ($n=28$), “seldom” participated in institutional and student activities during the dissertation

portion of their program. The next largest group, 30.2% ($n=19$) of those surveyed “never” stayed involved in the institution. These two groups encompassed 74.6% ($n=47$) of respondents.

Only 14.3% ($n=8$) of those surveyed “often” participated in institutional and student activities during their dissertation portion of the program. The same results (14.3%, $n=8$) were found by those who were “sometimes” involved in activities. Table 7 also illustrates that none of those surveyed were “always” involved with institutional and student activities.

Participants were asked to elaborate on their ratings of institutional involvement; many respondents provided more insight as to their low participation. Some specific examples from these responses are as follows:

A full-time teaching position and family were more of a priority.

I was able to attend some higher education functions, but distance/full-time work prevented involvement.

If you mean during my studies, you need to know that I also worked full-time and was raising two children.

I commuted 180 miles one-way to campus once a week for seven years and didn’t have time.

Due to working full-time, I didn’t have much time to get involved.

Moved from the area 5 years before completing program.

Several of those who were able to participate in university activities provided a clearer understanding of why they differed from the majority who did not.

I worked full-time at the university, so I could participate in research discussions; I think we had a graduate student group, too.

My involvement was limited to making phone calls to the committee and office staff. Occasional campus visits to attend football games – sometimes.

During the dissertation portion, I was on campus only to see my committee chair or committee members.

Church friends were supportive, especially those who held doctorates. On the other hand, my involvement in church activities and positions required much of my time. The most positive factor was having three friends going through the program together giving each other help and advice. Also, the military gave me excellent tools and outstanding preparation; discipline and perseverance.

I was often involved as the Higher Education Student Association President, Student Conferences.

Vice President of Higher Education Student Association. Participated in social activities. Attended sporting events. Worked as a RA during dissertation and in residence phases. Also visited a son who attended the university.

Participated in Higher Education Student Association.

Positive effect was being able to tap into library from home for journal articles.

Activities centered around socialization mainly with classmates in Higher Education sponsored events.

Never -Unless you count attending football and basketball games.

My doctoral experience would have been better if I'd been more involved with school, department, and committee.

Table 7

Question 5: To What Extent Did You Stay Involved With the Institutional Environment?

Involvement	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Always	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Often	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (12.7%)	8 (14.3%)
Sometimes	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	6 (9.5%)	8 (14.3%)
Seldom	6 (9.5%)	2 (3.2%)	20 (31.7%)	28 (44.4%)
Never	7 (11.1%)	2 (3.2%)	10 (15.9%)	19 (30.2%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 6. As shown in Table 8, the vast majority of participants, 87.3% (n=55), did not participate in academic peer support groups after reaching ABD status. Only 12.7% (n=8) of those surveyed chose to participate in a peer support group – these were all from the “graduated” category.

Those who responded that they participated in an academic peer support group were asked a follow-up question to rate their experience. Seven participants responded as follows: 57.1% (n=4) rated the experience as “excellent”; 28.6% (n=2) rated the quality of this experience as “outstanding”; and the remaining 14.3% (n=1) rated the experience as “good.”

Some respondents chose to write comments in the margins of their questionnaires. The following are examples of those annotations:

Yes, this was a formal group, but four of us came from Abilene every week for classes for about three years.

Yes, I was in a special (formal) dissertation class with peers.

I didn't know one existed - I didn't know about it.

Other survey participants provided comments on this topic through their responses to Question 19, seeking recommendations for improvement. Some specific examples are as follows:

Doctoral work is so lonely. I'd like to have been in some kind of support group for fellow commuters like myself. The solitary nature of writing this dissertation will make this a terminal degree for me. This is my fourth and last.

A support group might have helped.

We had study groups and the Higher Education Student Organization.

Table 8

Question 6: Did You Participate In An Academic Peer Support Group After Completing the Qualifying Exams?

Response	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Yes	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (12.7%)	8 (12.7%)
No	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	36 (57.1%)	55 (87.3%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 7. The Higher Education Research Seminar (EDHE 6310) is a requirement for all participants in the doctoral program. However, this was not always

the case. Prior to the Spring 1998 term, students were required to meet their research requirement through the Independent Research Course (EDHE 7000). This course was structured to allow them time to develop their dissertation proposals or work on their research projects. From 1992 through 1997, students were able to become more familiar with acceptable qualitative and quantitative research designs used in higher education through the newly developed Higher Education Research Seminar (EDHE 6310).

Therefore, from 1991 through 1997, doctoral students could take either EDHE 6310 or EDHE 7000 to meet their research requirement. Eight of the 63 survey participants, or 12.7%, fell into this category and responded to Question 7 as “N/A” (not applicable).

This was because it was not a requirement or not available during their course work portion of their program. In Spring 1998, the Higher Education Research Seminar (EDHE 6310) was completely revised and included a “series of seminars dedicated to the development of student research proposals. . . . The seminars bridge the gap between theory and practice” (Texas Tech University, 2000, p. 104).

Table 9 shows that almost half of the respondents, 49.2% ($n=31$), found EDHE 6310 to be beneficial to increasing their abilities to conduct independent research. Those who were “unsure” of these benefits comprised 28.6% ($n=18$) of the responses. Only 9.5%, or 10 participants, felt that the coursework did not increase their research abilities. One of these respondents offered the following comment: “I took this course twice and had a negative experience both times.”

Table 9

Question 7: The Higher Education Research Seminar (EDHE 6310) Was Beneficial to Increasing My Abilities to Conduct Independent Research.

Subscale	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Strongly Agree	4 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	8 (12.7%)	12 (19.0%)
Agree	5 (7.9%)	1 (1.6%)	13 (20.6%)	19 (30.2%)
Uncertain	3 (4.8%)	3 (4.8%)	12 (19.0%)	18 (28.6%)
Disagree	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	4 (6.3%)
Strongly Disagree	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.2%)
N/A	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (12.7%)	8 (12.7%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 8. Participants were asked to respond to their experiences with “writer’s block” during the dissertation phase of their program. As shown in Table 10, the majority of respondents (61.9%, n=39) felt they were not affected by this phenomenon. However, 38.1% (n=24) of participants experienced varying levels of writer’s block. A follow-up question was asked to better understand how these students dealt with this condition. The following are some of their responses:

I committed to doing at least “something” routinely, whenever unable to write – at least it gave me time to thinking. I also relied on a peer mentor who gave me support – I shared research related matter as well as obstacles.

Perspiration and work. Leaving the work long enough to let the information “percolate” and gain some objectivity.

Set it aside – go back later – refresh my memory regarding my purpose.

Periodic breaks outdoors, meditation, yoga, and breathing exercises.

Brute willpower – write “something” even if it is lousy – then rework it.

Read more – talked to Chair.

Quit working on dissertation and came back and work 2-3 days later.

Worked through it. Refused to accept the block

It was primarily procrastination. I finally made completion a priority.

Just re-gear and start fixing it.

Any kind of block is usually alleviated by doing something mindless like washing dishes or cleaning bathrooms.

Help from outside sources, but still have problems

I was able to overcome writer’s block by talking to my major professor.

I worked on the Table of Contents, Appendix, Bibliography, and other “easy” sections.

Stopped working part time. Basically, time and events finally motivated me to finish. . . . Fear that my committee members would move/retire – 3 did.

Did not – not able to overcome it.

Table 10

Question 8: Did You Experience “Writer’s Block” While Formulating or Writing Any Portion of the Dissertation?

Response	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.’s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Yes	8 (12.7%)	2 (3.2%)	14 (22.2%)	24 (38.1%)
No	7 (11.1%)	2 (3.2%)	30 (47.6%)	39 (61.9%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 9. This question contained a total of 26 factors influencing degree progress. Eight of these factors pertain to the doctoral program structure, content, and support. Table 11 depicts participants’ responses to each of these factors.

As shown in Table 11, subsection (l) Involvement within the University, the overwhelming majority of respondents, 69.8% (n=44), believed that university involvement was not a factor in their progress; 28.6% (n=18) of those surveyed respondents felt their involvement was positive; and only 1.6% (n=1) of respondents classified their involvement as negative.

Subsection (r) of Table 11 shows that 41.3% (n=26) of respondents believed that Program Requirements were not applicable to their progress; 39.7% (n=25) felt that it was a positive factor; and 19% (n=12) felt that this was a negative factor influencing their degree progress. Question 19 and 20 provided the opportunity for participants to respond

in detail to the positive or negative issues affecting their degree progress. The following are comments concerning the program requirements, structure, and residency.

Too many university and college hurdles. For example, I was initially denied college entrance due to low GPA in undergraduate studies from 20 years before without due consideration for recent accomplishments. I ended up as a top graduate with a 4.0 GPA in my program.

Greater responsiveness from the graduate school. Too many barriers were set up by this office. Classified and clerical staff had more to say about my dissertation and had more decisions-making power than did the Dean of the Graduate School.

Qualification Exams – way too stressful for what they were worth. The Quals experience was worth at least a 3 credit hour class as far as time spent – case scenarios would have made better questions.

We need more availability of mainframe computers for statistical analysis at the university – also I received very good support from personnel in using fairly complicated programs.

Recognition of Degree – not considered advanced degree at most other university levels.

The doctoral program was really improved by scheduling classes that met the needs of non-traditional students who were working full time. This included Friday afternoon and evening classes, Saturday classes, distance-learning classes.

Having courses on weekends and nights was positive.

Provide a course in higher education politics! Grant Writing!

More opportunities to take courses outside the College of Education.

I would like to have pursued more studies in fields related to my teaching area (Community Health and Cultural perception on Health).

The fact that off-campus courses were available was a very positive factor.

My progress was slowed by not being able to take classes I wanted because they were offered only once every two years.

Courses were taught by practicing Higher Education Administrators. I believe that really enriched our experience.

Change in program – I took way too long due to raising children, job, family. Program has been supportive of my delays.

Please - No residency requirements.

I had a wonderful experience. I suppose the most problematic part was the residency requirement. I felt it was an “artificial” requirement. I live and work on a campus as a HE Administrator. Living at the university seemed unnecessary for me. I hope that requirement has been removed.

It might have been nice to have a full-time academic experience of residency during the program, but it certainly did not prove necessary.

The only suggestion I have is to (and the problem is probably solved by now) be sure to tell graduate students the truth about distance education classes counting/not counting for residency.

Subsection (t) of Table 11 indicates that Research Skills were found to be a positive influence to 79.4% ($n=50$) of respondents; 12.7% ($n=8$) believed this was not applicable; and the remaining 7.9% ($n=5$) found it to be a negative influence to their progress.

Table 11, subsection (v) Support Groups (outside academia), reflects that the majority (61.9%, $n=39$) of those surveyed believed that this was not a factor in their degree progress; 36.5% ($n=23$) found this to be a positive influence; and a mere 1.6% ($n=1$) found it to be a negative influence.

Subsection (w) of Table 11 shows that a large majority (77.8%, $n=49$) of respondents believed that Support Groups (in academia) were not a factor in their progress; 19% ($n=12$) reported this as a positive influence; and the remaining 3.2% ($n=2$) found it to be a negative influence. One survey respondent offered the following:

One of the most positive parts of the experience was the networking in class (and out) with other professionals who were students. That informal support was great. Also, my colleague with whom I traveled back and forth 4 hours per week for six classroom years and less frequently during two dissertation years made all the

difference. We have often said that had we not had each other we would not have completed. We did get frustrated and discouraged, but fortunately not at the same time!

Also shown on Table 11, in subsection (x), are the frequencies of responses by those who felt Writing Skills were an influence upon their degree progress. Those who felt that this was a positive factor encompassed 81% ($\underline{n}=51$); 12.7% ($\underline{n}=8$) felt these skills had not affected their progress one way or another; and 6.3% ($\underline{n}=4$) felt it was a negative influence.

Table 11, subsection (y) Time-to-Degree, shows that almost half of those surveyed (49.2%, $\underline{n}=31$) believed that it had no impact on their progress; 33.3% ($\underline{n}=21$) believed that this was a positive factor; and 17.5% ($\underline{n}=11$) found it to be a negative factor.

As shown in the last subsection (z) of Table 11, 71.4% ($\underline{n}=45$) of those surveyed believed Topic Selection had a positive influence; 22.2% ($\underline{n}=14$) believed that this was not applicable to their progress; and the remaining 6.4% ($\underline{n}=4$) felt that it had a negative influence on their progress.

Table 11

Program Factors Influencing Degree Progress

(l) Involvement within the University	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Positively	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	16 (25.4%)	18 (28.6%)
Negatively	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)
N/A	13 (20.6%)	3 (4.8%)	28 (44.4%)	44 (69.8%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(r) Program Requirements				
Positively	3 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	22 (34.9%)	25 (39.7%)
Negatively	8 (12.7%)	1 (1.6%)	3 (4.8%)	12 (19.0%)
N/A	4 (6.3%)	3 (4.8%)	19 (30.2%)	26 (41.3%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(t) Research Skills				
Positively	11 (17.5%)	2 (3.2%)	37 (58.7%)	50 (79.4%)
Negatively	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	3 (4.8%)	5 (7.9%)
N/A	3 (4.8%)	1 (1.6%)	4 (6.3%)	8 (12.7%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

(table continues)

(v) Support Groups (outside academia)	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Positively	5 (7.9%)	0 (0%)	18 (28.6%)	23 (36.5%)
Negatively	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)
N/A	10 (15.9%)	3 (4.8%)	26 (41.2%)	39 (61.9%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(w) Support Groups (in academia)				
Positively	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12 (19.0%)	12 (19.0%)
Negatively	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.2%)
N/A	15 (23.8%)	3 (4.8%)	31 (49.2%)	49 (77.8%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(x) Writing Skills				
Positively	11 (17.4%)	3 (4.8%)	37 (58.7%)	51 (81.0%)
Negatively	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	4 (6.3%)
N/A	2 (3.2%)	1 (1.6%)	5 (7.9%)	8 (12.7%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

(table continues)

(y) Time-to-Degree	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Positively	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	19 (30.2%)	21 (33.3%)
Negatively	5 (7.9%)	1 (1.6%)	5 (7.9%)	11 (17.5%)
N/A	8 (12.7%)	3 (4.8%)	20 (31.7%)	31 (49.2%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

(z) Topic Selection				
Positively	9 (14.3%)	3 (4.8%)	33 (52.3%)	45 (71.4%)
Negatively	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	4 (6.4%)
N/A	4 (6.3%)	1 (1.6%)	9 (14.3%)	14 (22.2%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 13. This question contained a total of 18 employment, financial, or personal factors influencing degree progress. This question asked respondents to indicate which of these factors adversely affected their dissertation progress. As anticipated, participants marked only those of the 18 factors which they believed affected their progress. Results for this and subsequent sections reflect these survey responses in the form of a table and/or figure for ease of interpretation.

Table 12, subsection (l), shows that 38.2% (n=24) of respondents found the “Commute to the University” to adversely affect their dissertation progress. Figure 1 depicts the percentages of those who felt this to be a factor. Several of these survey

participants provided comments on this topic through their responses to Question 19, seeking recommendations for improvement.

I live two hours away from the university; I'm single with two children. I did not have the luxury of being involved in activities.

My daily commute each summer to campus was over 200 miles – this made for long days and limited time to complete reading assignments. I would have enjoyed having on-line courses so that I wouldn't have had to commute.

I live two hours from campus. Four hour commutes several times a week, plus family, a full and part time teaching positions left me no time for institutional environment.

I lived 150 miles away from campus in another state.

I lived 2 hours away from the university.

I moved from the university to Oregon just after passing the Qualification Exam and completion of all course work. I was not employed in Oregon – I focused solely on gathering data and writing chapters 1-3, then I moved to Albuquerque. I would commute to the university in order to work with my chair on the stats and last two chapters. I was not working full-time during this stage of my studies.

Table 12

Program Factors Affecting Dissertation Progress

	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
(1) Commute to University	3 (4.8%)	2 (3.2%)	19 (30.2%)	24 (38.2%)

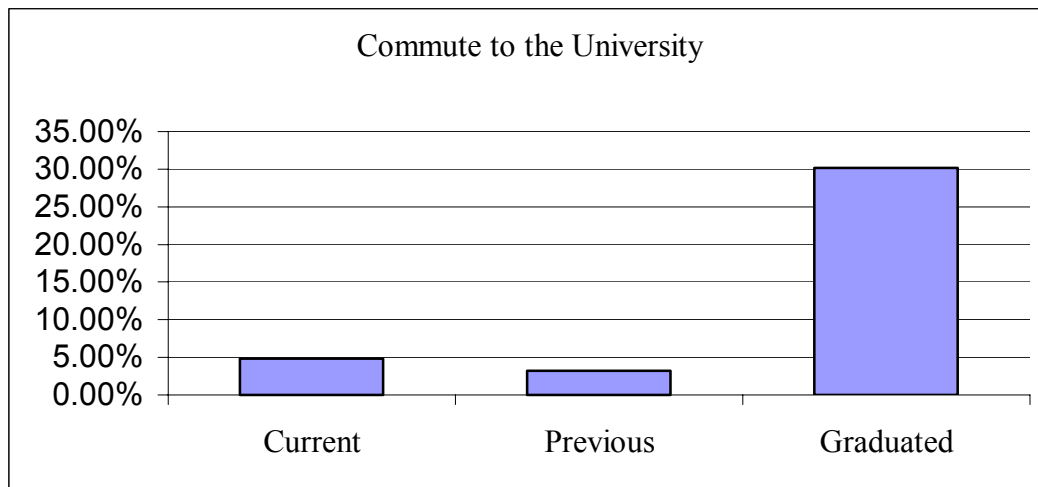


Figure 1. Respondents adversely affected by commute to the university.

Committee Advisement Factors

This section addresses survey responses applicable to Research Question 2: What are the perceived committee advisement factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?

Survey Question 9. As previously described, Question 9 contained a total of 26 factors influencing degree progress. Table 13 depicts participants' responses to each of the three factors pertaining to the committee and academic advisement issues.

As shown in Table 13, subsection (a), 65% ($\underline{n}=41$) of those surveyed found that Academic Advisement had a positive influence on their degree progress, and 30.2% ($\underline{n}=19$) felt that academic advisement did not influence their progress either in a positive or negative manner. Only 4.8% ($\underline{n}=3$) of respondents found this factor to be a negative influence on their progress. In a follow-up question, survey participants were asked to elaborate on how the employment, financial, or personal factors impeded their progress. The following comments were received:

Since I was a full-time student with accommodations on campus, I avoided most of these pitfalls.

It was 144 miles from work to campus (one way). It took 7 years for me to finish, not bad for working full-time (9 months some years – 12 months others).

Two hour commute one way – By the time I reached campus, I was not on my best.

Committee Chair reliable and available by phone/electronic mail. However, found face-to-face communications much more valuable. Committee and university an inconvenience – however believe did not adversely affect dissertation progress.

Time consuming to drive and meet residency requirements.

I drove 150 miles (one way) twice a week for 3 years.

Additionally, survey participants could elaborate on specific academic advisement factors in their responses to Questions 19 and 20. Some pertinent examples are as follows:

I wish we would have had better communications regarding expectations they had of me. Majority of time they were very supportive and helpful.

The university changed the committee requirement from five to three members. This was very helpful.

To have a graduate assistantship at the beginning of my program rather than offered to me at the last semester of my program.

Being older means it takes longer. Working full time is most difficult and health problems add to the stress – I suspect this is not unusual for doctoral students returning to academia after some years.

I didn't experience any major factors that affected my degree progress. What has been a negative outcome is that I'm still unable to find a professional full time position that I'd hope the degree would have helped.

Table 13, subsection (b), shows that 50.8% ($n=32$) believed that Academic Mentoring was not a factor in their progress; 41.3% ($n=26$) felt that it was a positive influence; and the remaining 7.9% ($n=5$) rated the experience as a negative influence.

Survey participants could elaborate on specific academic mentoring factors in their responses to Questions 19 and 20. Some pertinent examples are as follows:

More effort by faculty to be mentors.

More emphasis needed on a “theme” leading towards the dissertation – so all of the portfolio of work culminates in the dissertation as opposed to a bunch of individual assignments.

The department and Graduate school were very good to me. I also owe a great debt to my dissertation chair – mentor.

As displayed in Table 13, subsection (e), the majority of respondents, 68.3% ($n=43$), described the relationship with their Committee (other than chair) as a positive influence in their degree progress; 19% ($n=12$) felt that the committee did not influence their progress, and only 12.7% ($n=8$) rated the experience negatively. Many survey participants chose to provide additional comments on this topic through their responses to Questions 19 and 20. Some specific examples are as follows:

An effort by a faculty member who tried to side track me at every possible opportunity. If it weren't for my Chair– I would not have wanted to finish – much less been able to finish. After I finished my defense, my Chair dismissed this faculty member, and my committee passed me despite all of this members efforts to derail me even in the end.

In the five years I have been taking classes, there has been a high retirement rate of the faculty. Most of those I knew are gone.

At the time I went to the university, two of the HE full-time faculty members were not very good. I understand they are gone - I hope they have a better faculty now. I learned foundation and structure of knowledge and Myers-Briggs over and over.

One professor was extremely mean to me, he is no longer with the institution – unfortunately, neither am I.

Not losing 60% of faculty during program.

Subsection (f) of Table 13 shows that a substantial number, 79.4% ($n=50$), of respondents rated their Committee Chair as having a positive influence over their degree progress. Those who rated their experience as negative were found in the minority at 12.7% ($n=8$); and 7.9% ($n=5$) did not feel that the chair had influenced their progress. Several survey participants chose to provide additional comments on this topic through their responses to Questions 19 and 20. Some specific examples are as follows:

To be closer to my chair to have workshops on writing, research, etc intense weekend workshops. Maybe computer or web classes or just discuss with chair and committee by e-mail.

Less turnover in HE program so chairs didn't change; promises made at the beginning not kept, i.e., classes brought to Abilene.

Though it wasn't a real problem, I wish my chair had had more respect from the other committee members. I was fortunate that differences of opinion did not adversely impact me.

If I had "one" chair the entire time.

I was fortunate that these years were free from family demands or emotional or financial problems. I had the health, time, and commitment to make steady progress. Also – I had a firm vision about the structure of my dissertation and what I wanted the work to accomplish. My co-chairs were great – each helped in different ways.

Table 13

Committee Advisement Factors Influencing Degree Progress

(a) Academic advisement	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Positively	10 (15.8%)	3 (4.8%)	28 (44.4%)	41 (65.0%)
Negatively	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	3 (4.8%)
N/A	3 (4.8%)	1 (1.6%)	15 (23.8%)	19 (30.2%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(b) Academic mentoring				
Positively	5 (7.9%)	0 (0%)	21 (33.3%)	26 (41.3%)
Negatively	3 (4.8%)	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	5 (7.9%)
N/A	7 (11.1%)	2 (3.2%)	23 (36.5%)	32 (50.8%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(c) Committee (other than Chair)				
Positively	9 (14.3%)	0 (0%)	34 (54.0%)	43 (68.3%)
Negatively	2 (3.2%)	4 (6.4%)	2 (3.2%)	8 (12.7%)
N/A	4 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	8 (12.6%)	12 (19.0%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

(table continues)

(f) Committee chair	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Positively	9 (14.3%)	2 (3.2%)	39 (61.9%)	50 (79.4%)
Negatively	3 (4.8%)	2 (3.2%)	3 (4.8%)	8 (12.7%)
N/A	3 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	5 (7.9%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 10. As shown in Table 14, there were almost equal numbers of respondents who had experienced changes in their committee (52.4%, n=33) and those who had not (47.6%, n=30). The follow-up to this question asked, “If changes were made, who initiated them and why?” This subquestion produced the following responses:

Statistician requested by program chair, this statistician requested to be co-chair for time to serve and it was a blessing. He has been the most encouraging and helpful of anyone.

A member was added to my committee as a new faculty member who had special expertise in my area of study. He proved to be invaluable.

I did – two of the committee members who could not work together. I replaced the chair and 2 members.

One faculty member had a family crises, and the chair selected another member.

Rearranged committee to get faculty that were interested – most didn’t seem to want to help – only wanted their name on paper.

Changed one member due to personality conflict. I initiated the change.

All my committee either retired or moved. New Chair went overseas at a critical time – major factor.

I lost my chair when he failed to be promoted. I was fortunate to have an energetic and highly skilled Co-chair take over. This Co-chair was a master in qualitative research tools and mentored me to the point of being an expert as well.

Chair replaced by the department due to internal politics.

First Chair resigned, one committee member resigned – both were replaced through my efforts.

I have had 3 different chairs plus one temporary chair during my attempt.

The school - My chair was terminated. His replacement did not get tenure.

Chair moved, so I was assigned another chair. One committee member retired.

Table 14

Question 10: Were Changes Made to Your Dissertation Committee (Chair and Members) After Completing the Qualifying Exams?

Response	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Yes	9 (14.3%)	4 (6.4%)	20 (31.7%)	33 (52.4%)
No	6 (9.5%)	0 (0%)	24 (38.1%)	30 (47.6%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 11. As shown in Table 15, the majority of respondents, 79.3% (n=50), indicated that the relationship with their Dissertation Committee Chair was “outstanding” (47.6%) or “excellent” (31.7%). The rating of “good” was the third highest rating (14.3%, n=9), followed by “fair” (6.4%, n=4); none of the respondents described a “poor” relationship with their chair. Participants were asked to provide some specific

examples of how the dissertation committee chair either helped or hindered their progress. Some specific examples from these responses are as follows:

She has been available when I need her, she responds quickly to my e-mails and questions. Her critiques of my work have been helpful.

My chair is my mentor and friend. His support and belief in me has kept me moving toward the “prize.”

He has always kept in contact with me usually via e-mail, and he always makes time for face-to-face conversation when I am in town.

By calling and checking on my progress - he encouraged me. I felt I had someone from the university that wanted to help rather than make it tougher.

Very supportive – I’m the one who procrastinated.

Good criticism of work – helped me down the right path – of least resistance – extremely helpful.

Changed his mind – my dissertation was to fit his criteria.

Statistician co-chair has encouraged and challenged me by having me become an expert on structural equation modeling. It did hinder me by having to take a year to learn and study this statistical process. No one uses this in education department. I feel good about the knowledge now.

Chair was distracted because of a non-tenured decision by the university. Replacement was very good; however, I was no longer interested in completing the dissertation requirement given age, job, and other personal circumstances.

I had co-chairs – one helped to define topic and scope of research content. The other helped with research methodology (quantitative) and page-by-page critiques.

Coordinated committee, managed relationships of committee members, personal advice, collaborative research opportunities.

Political savvy about the university; calmness; years of experience working with committees; knowledge of subject; approval and support.

My chair would see me when I needed him. He was very supportive of my topic and the directions I wanted to go. He gave me great help in the statistical analysis – not a strength for me.

Chair and Co-chair provided immediate feedback on rewrites – often 24-hour turn around.

Talked with me whenever I need him, reviewed my work regularly, let me stay at his home when I came to campus to meet with him and others on the dissertation.

Directed me toward relevant research. Was understanding when the computer destroyed my first chapter.

My chair was very helpful with the statistics analysis. He also gave me access to his office and computer when I would come to town and work on the stats. (Sometimes I felt like a nuisance to him though.) He always read what I'd written – read it thoroughly.

He was always available and always made helpful suggestions. He was caring and supportive.

He gave me specific, clear feedback; met regularly and spent time discussing my work; had high expectations and stuck to them; and he was always encouraging.

Very supportive. One negative was I followed guidelines that he set for my proposal defense, then he did not defend me when others questioned those guidelines.

Final chair's willingness to pickup partially completed project was crucial. Original chair's background in subject area was equally essential.

Constant pressure and advice to clarify focus of the dissertation topic. Freedom to select my own topic commensurate with background and interests.

Kept me on deadlines without which I would not have finished.

Table 15

Question 11: My Relationship With the Dissertation Committee Chair Could Best Be Described As?

Subscale	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Outstanding	3 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	27 (42.8%)	30 (47.6%)
Excellent	7 (11.1%)	1 (1.6%)	12 (19.0%)	20 (31.7%)
Good	4 (6.3%)	2 (3.2%)	3 (4.8%)	9 (14.3%)
Fair	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.2%)	4 (6.4%)
Poor	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 12. Table 16 shows that the majority of respondents, 74.6% (n=47), felt that the relationship with their Dissertation Committee could best be described as either “good” (44.4%, n=28) or “excellent” (30.2%, n=19). Another 15.9% (n=10) rated this relationship as “outstanding,” and the remaining 9.5% (n=6) found it to be “fair” or “poor.” Participants were asked to provide some specific examples of how the committee either helped or hindered their progress. Some specific examples from these responses are as follows:

I have only worked closely with two of the three people on my committee thus far. Their professional critiques and advice have helped me progress in writing the dissertation.

They helped me narrow my study, and offered suggestions were right on target.

Members critiqued parts and helped with wording of dissertation.

They really had no impact – my sense was that they paid little attention outside of formal meetings.

Nitpicky changes hindered; close reading of dissertation drafts and constructive criticism helped; moral support helped.

Support of proposal – good suggestions for technical and content areas.

I had a super group of folks to work with. Only one member was ever less than positive and supportive. He never really bought into my topic.

Each member shared generously their expertise in various portions of the dissertation.

They invested lots of time, listened and posed challenges that made me evaluate and defend my work informally as I was writing.

No real problems. It is just difficult to please five people.

One committee member even arranged for a typist for me.

My committee was helpful in the timely way they reviewed each chapter.

Individually, members offered good advice, when asked.

Less involved overall than Chair – help with writing primarily.

The final committee was supportive.

Third committee member – almost no involvement. Had quantitative chair and qualitative methodologist. Overall, worked well together despite philosophies.

Encouragement, answered questions.

Positive and constructive suggestions for improvement of the dissertation; willingness to work around time and distance constraints.

I could count on them to discuss my dissertation topic and progress without criticism – the open discussions provided me much confidence.

Table 16

Question 12: My Relationship With the Dissertation Committee Could Best Be Described As?

Subscale	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Outstanding	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (15.9%)	10 (15.9%)
Excellent	5 (7.9%)	0 (0%)	14 (22.2%)	19 (30.2%)
Good	7 (11.1%)	2 (3.2%)	19 (30.2%)	28 (44.4%)
Fair	2 (3.2%)	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	4 (6.3%)
Poor	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Personal Factors

This section addresses survey responses applicable to Research Question 3: What are the perceived personal factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?

Survey Question 9. Table 17 depicts participants' responses to each of the 12 factors from Question 9 pertaining to the personal issues influencing degree progress.

Subsection (c) of Table 17 shows that 44.4% (n=28) of survey respondents felt that Age was a positive influence on their degree progress. An almost equal amount, 46.1% (n=29), felt that age was not a factor, and the remaining 9.5% (n=6) felt it was a negative influence.

Table 17, subsection (d) revealed that 49.2% (n=31) of respondents believed Anxiety did not influence their progress; 42.9% (n=27) found it to be a negative influence; and only 7.9% (n=5) felt that it was a positive influence.

As shown in Table 17, subsection (h), 47.6% (n=30) respondents believed that Family Obligations had a negative influence on their degree progress; 34.9% (n=22) believed that family obligations had no influence; and 17.5% (n=11) felt this was a positive.

Table 17, subsection (i), shows that an overwhelming majority, 88.9% (n=56), of those surveyed believed that Family Support had a positive influence on their degree progress. None of the respondents reported this to be a negative factor, and only 11.1% (n=7) felt this was not applicable to their progress.

As shown in Table 17, subsection (k), Gender was not felt to be a factor in degree progress by 79.4% of the respondents. Those believing that gender was a factor amounted to 19% (n=12) of those surveyed, and the remaining 1.6% (n=1) stated that gender was a negative factor.

As depicted in subsection (m) of Table 17, Motivation was believed to have a positive influence on degree progress by 85.7% (n=54) of those surveyed; 9.5% (n=6) believed it was not a factor; and 4.8% (n=3) felt it to be a negative influencer.

Other Obligations were a negative influence to 54% (n=34) of respondents, as shown in Table 17, subsection (n). Another 41.3% (n=26) of respondents felt that this was not a factor; and the remaining 4.8% (n=3) felt that it was a positive influence upon their progress.

Table 17, subsection (o), shows that 39.7% ($\underline{n}=25$) of those surveyed believed that Perfectionism was not a factor in their degree progress; 36.5% ($\underline{n}=23$) felt it was a positive influence; and 23.8% ($\underline{n}=15$) felt it was a negative influence.

Persistence towards degree progress was shown to be a positive factor by 81% ($\underline{n}=51$) of those surveyed, as depicted in Table 17, subsection (p); 17.4% ($\underline{n}=11$) indicated that persistence was not a factor, and only 1.6% ($\underline{n}=1$) of respondents felt it to be a negative influence in their progress.

As shown in Table 17, subsection (q), Procrastination was not a factor in the degree progress by the majority (52.3%, $\underline{n}=33$) of survey respondents. However, 42.9% ($\underline{n}=27$) of those surveyed believed that procrastination was a negative influence, and 4.8% ($\underline{n}=3$) felt that it was a positive influence in their degree progress.

Table 17, subsection (s), shows that Race was not considered to be a factor towards degree progress by the overwhelming majority, 87.3% ($\underline{n}=55$), of survey respondents. However, 12.7% ($\underline{n}=8$) believed that race was a positive factor toward their progress, and no one surveyed felt it was a negative influence.

As shown in Table 17, subsection (u), Stress was believed to have a negative influence on the majority (55.6%, $\underline{n}=35$) of those surveyed. Another 31.7% ($\underline{n}=20$) of respondents felt that stress had no impact, and 12.7% ($\underline{n}=8$) believed it had a positive influence upon their progress.

Table 17

Personal Factors Influencing Degree Progress

(c) Age	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Positively	5 (7.9%)	2 (3.2%)	21 (33.3%)	28 (44.4%)
Negatively	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	5 (7.9%)	6 (9.5%)
N/A	9 (14.3%)	2 (3.2%)	18 (28.6%)	29 (46.1%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(d) Anxiety				
Positively	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (7.9%)	5 (7.9%)
Negatively	7 (11.1%)	3 (4.8%)	17 (27.0%)	27 (42.9%)
N/A	8 (12.7%)	1 (1.6%)	22 (34.9%)	31 (49.2%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(h) Family obligations				
Positively	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	9 (14.3%)	11 (17.5%)
Negatively	13 (20.6%)	1 (1.6%)	16 (25.4%)	30 (47.6%)
N/A	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.2%)	19 (30.2%)	22 (34.9%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

(table continues)

(i) Family support	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Positively	15 (23.8%)	2 (3.2%)	39 (61.9%)	56 (88.9%)
Negatively	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
N/A	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	5 (7.9%)	7 (11.1%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(k) Gender				
Positively	3 (4.8%)	1 (1.6%)	8 (12.6%)	12 (19.0%)
Negatively	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)
N/A	12 (19.0%)	3 (4.8%)	35 (55.6%)	50 (79.4%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(m) Motivation				
Positively	12 (19.0%)	2 (3.2%)	40 (63.5%)	54 (85.7%)
Negatively	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	3 (4.8%)
N/A	2 (3.2%)	1 (1.6%)	3 (4.7%)	6 (9.5%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

(table continues)

(n) Other obligations	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Positively	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.8%)	3 (4.8%)
Negatively	13 (20.6%)	4 (6.4%)	17 (27.0%)	34 (54.0%)
N/A	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	24 (38.1%)	26 (41.3%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(o) Perfectionism				
Positively	5 (7.9%)	1 (1.6%)	17 (27.0%)	23 (36.5%)
Negatively	3 (4.8%)	1 (1.6%)	11 (17.4%)	15 (23.8%)
N/A	7 (11.1%)	2 (3.2%)	16 (25.4%)	25 (39.7%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(p) Persistence				
Positively	11 (17.5%)	1 (1.6%)	39 (61.9%)	51 (81.0%)
Negatively	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)
N/A	4 (6.3%)	2 (3.2%)	5 (7.9%)	11 (17.4%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

(table continues)

(q) Procrastination	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Positively	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.2%)	3 (4.8%)
Negatively	9 (14.3%)	1 (1.6%)	17 (27.0%)	27 (42.9%)
N/A	6 (9.5%)	2 (3.2%)	25 (39.6%)	33 (52.3%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(s) Race				
Positively	2 (3.2%)	1 (1.6%)	5 (7.9%)	8 (12.7%)
Negatively	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
N/A	13 (20.6%)	3 (4.8%)	39 (61.9%)	55 (87.3%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)
(u) Stress				
Positively	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (12.7%)	8 (12.7%)
Negatively	9 (14.3%)	3 (4.8%)	23 (36.5%)	35 (55.6%)
N/A	6 (9.5%)	1 (1.6%)	13 (20.6%)	20 (31.7%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 13. As previously stated, Question 13 contained a total of 18 employment, financial, or personal factors influencing degree progress and asked respondents to indicate which of these factors adversely affected their dissertation

progress. The 8 “personal factors” from Question 13 pertaining to this section are portrayed in both table and figure format for ease of interpretation.

As shown in Table 18, the influences of Family Obligations and Stress/Anxiety were factors reported most often by respondents. These issues were followed by Personal Health/Injury, Death of a Family Member, Family Member Health/Injury, Divorce/Separation, Birth of a Child, and Marriage as factors adversely affecting degree progress. Figure 2 depicts the percentages of those who felt these 8 issues were factors in their progress. In a follow-up question, survey participants were asked to elaborate on how the employment, financial, or personal factors impeded their progress. The following comments were received:

The demands of work and family are my priority. I have to handle these responsibilities before I can sit down and focus on the dissertation.

Illness and surgery.

The death of a family member delayed my dissertation defense for 1 semester.

I had total hip replacement and still had to sign up for a course - I couldn't miss a semester. The committee was time consuming – 5 hrs round trip for a 3 hr class.”

Having both parents ill and hospitalized as well as having a parent die requires time to grieve and tend to family matters.

Divorced (no support person at home). Lived 350 miles from university. Treated for depression and alcohol abuse.

Demands from many directions on my time.

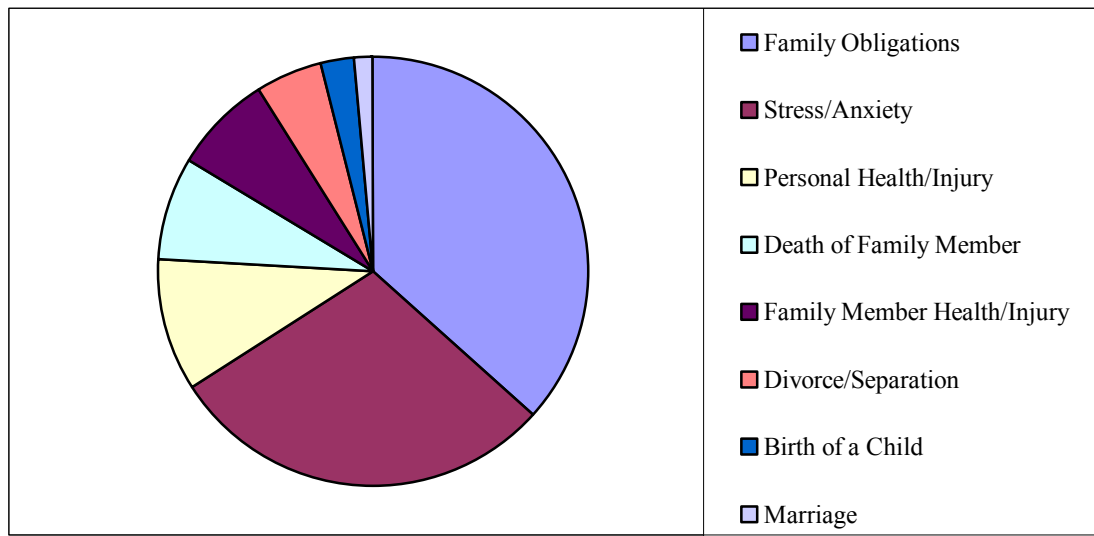
It was hard to sacrifice so much time that I wanted to spend with my children.

A malignant melanoma with years of testing added stress and anxiety and a full-time job as a faculty member and director of a program.

Table 18

Personal Factors Affecting Dissertation Progress

Variable	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
(d) Divorce/Separation	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	2 (3.2%)	4 (6.3%)
(e) Birth of a Child	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	2 (3.2%)
(i) Family Obligations	13 (20.6%)	1 (1.6%)	15 (23.8%)	29 (46.0%)
(j) Stress/Anxiety	10 (15.9%)	1 (1.6%)	12 (19.0%)	23 (36.5%)
(m) Personal Health/Injury	2 (3.2%)	2 (3.2%)	4 (6.3%)	8 (12.7%)
(n) Death of Family Member	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	5 (7.9%)	6 (9.5%)
(q) Marriage	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)
(r) Family Member Health	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	4 (6.3%)	6 (9.5%)

Figure 2. Personal factors which adversely affected dissertation progress.

Survey Question 14. As shown in Table 19, the vast majority of respondents (96.8%, $n=61$) reported that their family was supportive of their study for the doctorate. Only 3.2% ($n=2$) of those surveyed stated that their family was not supportive.

Table 19

Question 14: In General, Was Your Family Supportive of Your Study For the Doctorate?

Response	Current (Active ABDs) n (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) n (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) n (%)	Row Totals n (%)
Yes	15 (23.8%)	3 (4.8%)	43 (68.2%)	61 (96.8%)
No	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.2%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 15. Table 20 shows that 30.0% ($n=19$) of those surveyed felt that Family Commitments were “sometimes” relevant to their progress; 28.6% ($n=18$) thought they “often” took time away from their studies, as did the 28.6% ($n=18$) of those who felt that this “seldom” occurred. The remaining 12.8% ($n=8$) were equally split in their belief that this factor “always” or “never” affected their studies. A follow-up question asked participants to elaborate on their response to family commitment distractions. Some specific examples are as follows:

I had a variety of commitments, a mother with cancer, a son divorced, a son ill, a son in a car wreck, and a daughter who married.

Married with four children, ages 11, 9, 5, and 1. Lots of time demands on me.

Daughter moved back to hometown. Got to spend more time with grandchildren. I helped with their move and home repairs.

Cared for my mother in my home; stayed enrolled and worked full time during her last year.

With a seven year old, we have to take Tae Kwon Do and violin concerts, not to mention making sure everybody's spirits stay up.

My children were away at school and I had to make a couple of related trips. My husband is a rancher, as I sometimes had obligations with bookkeeping.

I am a single parent with two children. They will always be given priority. I have to handle these responsibilities before I can sit down and focus on the dissertation.

Travel to take care of parents during multiple surgeries stopped the writing process. My husband moved the year before – making me a single parent to sell a house.

Family commitments often took time away from my studies – but it was worth it to be with them.

I was a single parent with teens to guide during my doctoral work. I was also employed full time and doing graduate work.

I had two children during the dissertation stage, and my husband lost his job.

My parents occasionally had health or other needs I attended. Both parents died during my doctoral studies.

I had two babies during the time I was working on my degree.

My family seldom was a distraction. They were very helpful; I could not have done it without them.

My family – husband – had done this earlier and I knew what was involved – he was very supportive and encouraging.

Family obligations were a priority – sometimes forcing study into the early morning hours.

Table 20

Question 15: To What Extent Did Family Commitments Take Time Away From Your Doctoral Studies?

Subscale	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Always	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.2%)	4 (6.4%)
Often	5 (7.8%)	1 (1.6%)	12 (19.0%)	18 (28.6%)
Sometimes	6 (9.4%)	0 (0%)	13 (20.6%)	19 (30.0%)
Seldom	3 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	15 (23.8%)	18 (28.6%)
Never	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	2 (3.2%)	4 (6.4%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 16. Table 21 shows that 38.1% (n=24) of surveyed respondents felt Personal Obligations “seldom” took time away from their studies. Another 34.9% (n=22) believed that this occurred “sometimes”; 19% (n=12) felt that it occurred “often”; 4.8% (n=3) said “never”; and the remaining 3.2% (n=2) responded that personal obligations “always” affected their studies. A follow-up question asked participants to elaborate on their response to personal obligation distractions. Some specific examples are as follows:

Family and social relationships are always coming up – birthdays, holidays, etc., when I give time to personal obligations rather than write the dissertation Church responsibilities, job requirements – they want me to finish this pronto!

I started a new business.

My personal obligations are my family.

I was a very committed student. I am obligated to provide proper parenting to my children, but I usually placed school before personal pursuits.

Sold a house, was an elder in my church – full time employment.

Sister was sick and required my blood donations – she died.

Full time employment was a big factor.

I was a full time college administrator. My job required travel and many community related meetings during the evenings.

I worked on campus; lived two blocks away; my husband was also in grad school (same college); I didn't have kids. All this made my doctoral studies relatively easy.

I arranged my schedule to put school first for 1-½ years.

After completing the TRIO grant proposal, I refocused the energy, commitment, time and discipline to completing the dissertation. It took 18 months to finish the surveys, results, stats, and writing.

I have several commitments to my church – one of which is planning a wilderness camp for teenaged girls each summer.

Table 21

Question 16: To What Extent Did Personal Obligations Take Time Away From Your Doctoral Studies?

Subscale	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Always	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.2%)
Often	4 (6.3%)	1 (1.6%)	7 (11.1%)	12 (19.0%)
Sometimes	4 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	18 (28.6%)	22 (34.9%)
Seldom	6 (9.5%)	1 (1.6%)	17 (27.0%)	24 (38.1%)
Never	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)	3 (4.8%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Relevant Financial Factors

This section addresses survey responses applicable to Research Question 4: What are the perceived financial factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?

Survey Question 9. Table 22 depicts participants' responses to the Financial Assistance factors from Question 9 influencing their progress. Table 22 indicates that the majority (60.3%, n=38) of respondents believed that financial assistance was not influential in their degree progress. An additional 25.4% (n=16) felt it was a positive influence, and the remaining 14.3% (n=9) believed financial assistance to have a negative influence on their degree progress.

Table 22

Relevant Financial Factors Influencing Degree Progress

(j) Finance assistance	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Positively	6 (9.5%)	1 (1.6%)	9 (14.3%)	16 (25.4%)
Negatively	2 (3.2%)	1 (1.6%)	6 (9.5%)	9 (14.3%)
N/A	7 (11.1%)	2 (3.2%)	29 (46.0%)	38 (60.3%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 13. The four “relevant financial factors” of 18 employment, financial, or personal factors influencing degree progress, pertaining to Question 13, are shown in this section. They are portrayed in both table and figure format for ease of interpretation.

As shown in Table 23, Cost of the Doctorate, Financial Problems, Change to Income, and Lost Financial Aid were factors adversely affecting degree progress. Figure 3 depicts the percentages of those who felt that these four issues were factors in their progress. In a follow-up question, survey participants were asked to elaborate on how the employment, financial, or personal factors impeded their progress. The following comments were received:

Major move in middle of dissertation process; new position a senior administrative level; internal departmental politics, which required, but unwanted, change of chair.

I am part time retired, had no use for the degree.

We each have limited budgets and time - I didn't qualify for financial aid, nor did I receive scholarships. Overall, it was more a matter of time and money than anything else.

Table 23

Relevant Financial Factors Affecting Dissertation Progress

Variable	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
(a) Change of Income	3 (4.8%)	2 (3.2%)	1 (1.6%)	6 (9.5%)
(c) Lost Financial Aid	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)
(h) Cost of Doctorate	4 (6.3%)	1 (1.6%)	7 (11.1%)	12 (19.0%)
(p) Financial Problems	2 (3.2%)	1 (1.6%)	4 (6.3%)	7 (11.1%)

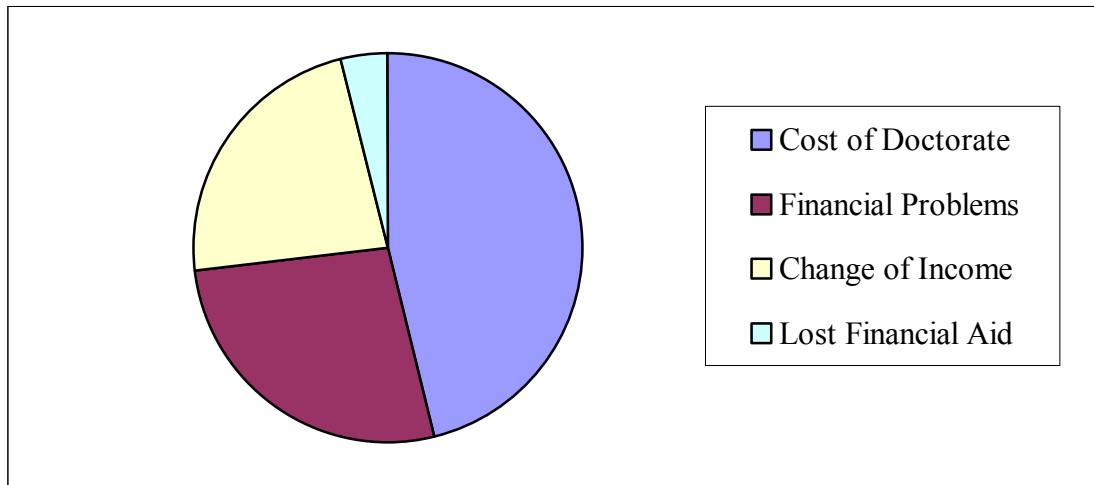


Figure 3. Relevant financial factors which adversely affected dissertation progress.

Survey Question 17. Respondents were asked to indicate which of the nine financial options were used in funding their doctoral studies. The data, as shown in Table 24, revealed that “full-time employment” was marked most often by 87.3% ($\underline{n}=55$) of the respondents. The second most often selected form of finance was “part-time employment” (23.8%, $\underline{n}=15$); followed by “other” (19%, $\underline{n}=12$); “financial aid” (17.5%, $\underline{n}=11$); “savings” and “personal loans,” each at 14.3% ($\underline{n}=9$); “scholarships” (9.5%, $\underline{n}=6$); “grants” (4.8%, $\underline{n}=3$); and “gifts” (3.2%, $\underline{n}=2$).

Financing percentages for each of the nine options, by student groups, are as follows:

Current Students:

(5) 100% Full-time Employment

98% Full-time Employment; 2% Scholarship

95% Full-time Employment; 5% Scholarship

85% Full-time Employment; 10% Financial Aid; 5% Savings

80% Full-time Employment; 20% Savings

80% Full-time Employment; 20% Financial Aid

50% Full-time Employment; 50% Financial Aid

50% Full-time Employment; 15% Part-time Employment; 5% Grant(s); 5% Savings; 10% Financial Aid; 5% Scholarship(s); 10% Personal Loan(s)

33% Full-time Employment; 33% Savings; 33% Personal Loans

80% Other: Fellowship from employer; 20% Full-time Employment;

75% Other: Employer School Refund Program; 25% Full-time Employment

Previous Students:

100% Other: Hazelwood Fee and Tuition Exemption

75% Full-time Employment; 25% Tuition Assistance

50% Full-time Employment; 50% Part-time Employment

80% Part-time Employment; 20% Other: Spousal Income

Graduated Students:

(23) 100% Full-time Employment

90% Full-time Employment; 10% Gift(s)

90% Full-time Employment; 10% Scholarship

80% Full-time Employment; 20% Grant(s)

80% Full-time Employment; 20% Personal Loan(s)

80% Full-time Employment; 20% Financial Aid

75% Full-time Employment; 25% Grant(s)

50% Full-time Employment; 50% Part-time employment

50% Full-time Employment; 50% Savings

50% Full-time Employment; 25% Savings; 25% Personal Loans

40% Full-time Employment; 40% Part-time; 20% Personal Loan(s)

Table 24

Question 17: What Percentages of the Following Financial Options Were Used To Fund Your Doctoral Studies? (i.e., 15%, 20%, 50%, etc.)

Options	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Part-Time Employment	2 (3.2%)	3 (4.8%)	10 (15.9%)	15 (23.8%)
Full-Time Employment	15 (23.8%)	1 (1.6%)	39 (61.9%)	55 (87.3%)
Grants	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	3 (4.8%)
Savings	6 (9.5%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.8%)	9 (14.3%)
Financial Aid	6 (9.5%)	0 (0%)	5 (7.9%)	11 (17.5%)
Scholarship(s)	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	4 (6.3%)	6 (9.5%)
Gift(s)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	2 (3.2%)
Personal Loan(s)	3 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	6 (9.5%)	9 (14.3%)
Other	2 (3.2%)	3 (4.8%)	7 (11.1%)	12 (19.0%)

Employment Factors

This section addresses survey responses applicable to Research Question 5: What are the perceived employment factors that may have influenced or affected the progress of current, previous, and graduated students?

Survey Question 9. Table 25 reflects survey responses to the employment factors associated with Question 9. The data indicates that 49.2% (n=31) of the respondents believed that employment factors influenced their degree progress in a positive manner.

An additional 34.9% ($n=22$) of participants felt that it was a negative factor, and 15.9% ($n=10$) believed that employment issues had no influence on their degree progress.

Table 25

Employment Factors Influencing Degree Progress

(g) Employment	Current (Active ABDs) n (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) n (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) n (%)	Row Totals n (%)
Positively	3 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	28 (44.4%)	31 (49.2%)
Negatively	10 (15.8%)	3 (4.8%)	9 (14.3%)	22 (34.9%)
N/A	2 (3.2%)	1 (1.6%)	7 (11.1%)	10 (15.9%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Survey Question 13. The five “employment factors” of the 18 employment, financial, or personal factors influencing degree progress, pertaining to Question 13, are shown in this section. They are portrayed in both table and figure format for ease of interpretation.

As shown in Table 26, the influences of the Demands of the Job, Work Related Travel, Received Promotion, Retired, and Lost Job/Employment are factors adversely affecting degree progress. Figure 4 depicts the percentages of those who felt that these five issues were factors in their progress. In a follow-up question, survey participants were asked to elaborate on how the employment, financial, or personal factors impeded their progress. The following comments were received:

We've had three of us in college for some time now while my husbands job has taken a downturn. Hence, I am teaching full –time in a high school as well as two community college courses. Do people actually sleep eight hours at a time?

Demand of my job and work related travel caused taking of incompletes, which had to be finished while taking new courses.

I have been through a major job change and currently a promotion.

My employee has announced the possible sale of my work location. This could mean an early retirement, or transfer, or a new employer. Has slowed my progress.

I moved to take a new job. My distance from the institution and starting a new business make it tougher to finish.

Changed jobs twice (due to better offers). Had to focus on new jobs.

If I don't work full-time, I can't afford school. If I can't finish the program (get the doctorate), then I can't promote or stay in present job. A vicious cycle.

Challenged time management skills.

Not easy to work full time and write dissertation – took much energy and discipline.

It was necessary for me to write a competitive TRIO grant during this time – that stopped dissertation writing for about 6 months. However, it was great preparation for the discipline necessary to write the dissertation!

Demands of job; prevented me from attending full time. Family obligations; raising a family is time consuming. Commute to university 3 hours one-way takes its toll physically and mentally. Again, prevented full time attendance.

I had several time-consuming work related committee assignments at my own college where I taught. Campus is 165 miles from my home, which was time-consuming and expensive.

Table 26

Employment Factors Affecting Dissertation Progress.

Factors	Current (Active ABDs)	Previous (Attrited ABDs)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s)	Row Totals
	<u>n</u> (%)	<u>n</u> (%)	<u>n</u> (%)	<u>n</u> (%)
(b) Retired	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)
(f) Demands of Job	10 (15.9%)	1 (1.6%)	24 (38.1%)	35 (55.6%)
(g) Work Related Travel	6 (9.5%)	0 (0%)	9 (14.3%)	15 (23.8%)
(k) Lost Job/Employment	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)
(o) Received Promotion	5 (7.9%)	0 (0%)	4 (6.3%)	9 (14.3%)

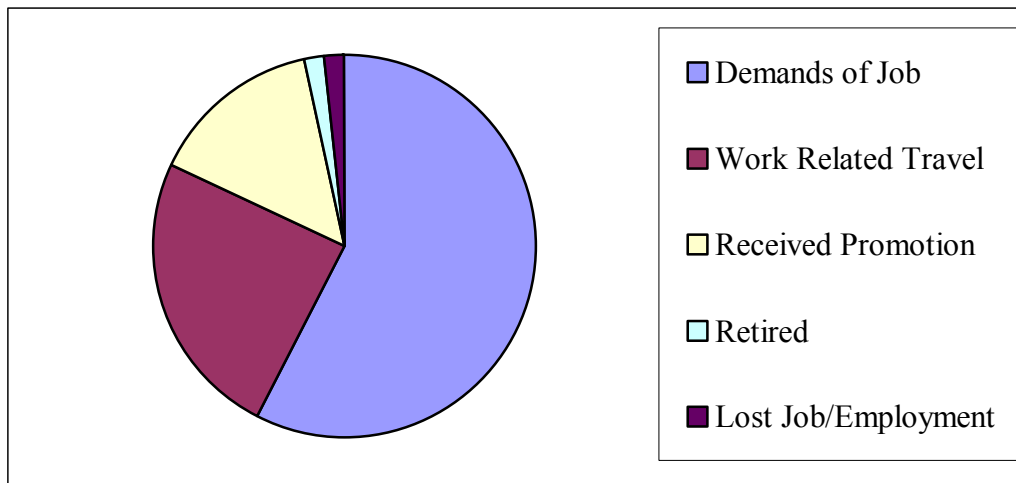


Figure 4. Employment factors which adversely affected dissertation progress.

Survey Question 18. Table 27 shows that a majority of respondents (87.3%, n=55) believed that their employer was supportive of their completing the doctoral degree. Those who felt their employers did not support their degree goals amounted to 9.5% (n=6); and 3.2% (n=2) indicated that their employer was not concerned about their completing the degree.

Table 27

Question 18: If Employed, Was Your Employer Supportive of Your Completing the Degree?

Response	Current (Active ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Previous (Attrited ABDs) <u>n</u> (%)	Graduated (Completed Ed.D.'s) <u>n</u> (%)	Row Totals <u>n</u> (%)
Yes	13 (20.6%)	2 (3.2%)	40 (63.5%)	55 (87.3%)
No	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	4 (6.3%)	6 (9.5%)
N/A	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.2%)
Column totals	15 (23.8%)	4 (6.4%)	44 (69.8%)	63 (100%)

Other Factors Affecting Degree Progress

Survey Question 19. This question was an open-ended question that asked, “What would have made your doctoral experience a better one? Many of these responses have been documented and incorporated into earlier sections of this study. However, the following are responses to this question that did not conform to previous sections.

The experience has been fine on a professional level. The personal obligations are the problem and those cannot be changed.

If I had been physically closer to a good library.

I would've pushed more frequently.

Not working, more motivation, better writing skills – same chair (had 3-4) more pressure less deadlines.

Communications; a better EDHE 6310; 2 different types of statistics classes; 2 hours a week course to do Chapter 4.

Being there – and getting to finish.

Positive support from graduate dean.

Less responsibility – more time. I finished against the odds because I really needed to finish and get on to supporting my family.

Support of junior college where I was employed. Library facilities in my hometown.

Leave of absence from job.

More help from the library for such things as Inter-library Loan. Considering I pay those damn fees and live two hours away, the least they could do is ship a book to me now and then, but that's not SOP.

A Ph.D. program at the university.

If I were a better typist.

Living in town.

Not moving during the writing process.

A study committee – clearer requirements.

Support from my employer.

Living closer to campus. Being younger.

No university help was available for financing the degree even though I asked – had 4.0.GPA.

Graduate school faculty who helped you – not try to keep you from finishing.

Professors who were willing to teach at times the students can go to class – come to El Paso and teach weekend classes.

Overall - was a positive experience.

Survey Question 20. Question 20 was an open-ended question that asked, “ What other factors (positive or negative) affected your degree progress that have not been covered in the previous questions? Many of these responses have been documented and incorporated into earlier sections of this study. However, the following are responses to this question that did not conform to previous sections.

I stopped out for about four years after divorcing, and then my mother died. I had to give my children time to grow up a little before I could give the time necessary to accomplish the degree. I only lack 12 hours of course work when I stopped out.

I want to clarify the fact that I consciously chose not to complete the dissertation. I am responsible for this decision, and I do not blame anyone else for the choice I made...I have a substantial amount of residual anger at myself as a result of my choices. Strangely enough, I have no remorse for having chosen not to finish the degree requirements, but I have a substantial amount of residual anger for having been so foolish as to waste so much time and money.

Not willing to give up free time, playing golf, travel, etc., to complete the doctorate. Wasn't particularly impressed by the nature of the rigor applicable to the dissertation – found the process mostly political, not intellectual.

I would have progressed through a bit slower, as I felt guilty at times due to focusing too much on Grad school and not enough on family and job.

Prior to the move in 1992, my employer at one point made my termination of the program a condition of continued employment. After 1992, the college for which I worked was highly supportive of my degree work.

Scholarship allowed for full-time work on dissertation that would have otherwise been impossible – probably adequately addressed in previous questions – getting at issue of amount of time able to devote to doctoral studies.

Plain old laziness.

Conclusions

The following 28 factors that affected current, previous, and graduated students' degree progress as reported by at least 50% of the survey respondents, are ranked in order of their influence.

1. Relationship With Dissertation Chair (100%)
2. Relationship With Dissertation Committee (100%)
3. Employer Supportiveness (96.8%)
4. Family Support of Doctoral Study (96.8%)
5. Committee Chair (92.1%)
6. Motivation (90.5%)
7. Family Support (88.9%)
8. Financing their degree through full-time employment (87.3%)
9. Research Skills (87.3%)
10. Writing Skills (87.3%)
11. Employment (84.1%)
12. Persistence (82.6%)
13. Committee - other than Chair (81.0%)
14. Topic Selection (77.8%)
15. Academic Advisement (69.8%)
16. Stress (68.3%)
17. Family Obligations (65.1%)
18. Family Commitments (65.0%)
19. Perfectionism (60.3%)

- 20. Program Requirements (58.7%)
- 21. The Higher Education Research Seminar Course (EDHE 6310) (58.7%)
- 22. Personal Obligations (57.1%)
- 23. Demands of the Job (55.6%)
- 24. Other Obligations (54.8%)
- 25. Age (53.9%)
- 26. Changes to Dissertation Committee (52.4%)
- 27. Time-to-Degree (50.8%)
- 28. Anxiety (50.8%)

This study focused on the factors influencing student completion or noncompletion of the degree program. It was found that many of these factors were interrelated and influenced one another. One example of this interrelationship may be found in the area of student/spouse employment and job demands and their influences on the factors of committee and committee chair relationships; employer support; family support, commitments, and obligations; finances and financing the degree; motivation; perfectionism; persistence; personal and other obligations; stress; and anxiety. Many other combinations of interactions are possible. However, the extent of these interactions could be determined only through individual studies of each of these elements.

Discussion

Research suggests that those who attain the classification of ABD face an 80-82.4% chance of completing their degree program (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Quinn, 1992). Researchers have suggested a multitude of factors that contribute to the success or failure of ABDs towards program completion. These include academic advisement and

mentoring; employment; family support and obligations; financial assistance; integration, involvement, and interaction with the institution; personality variables of motivation, procrastination, and perseverance; research skills; program structure; stress and anxiety; time-to-degree; and topic selection.

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors affecting student progress, attrition, and retention after reaching ABD status. The design expanded the scope of previous doctoral attrition and retention research by including all affected participants – whether they were currently enrolled ABDs, previously attrited ABDs, or successfully graduated Ed.D.'s of the program. Including all relevant participants ensured an inclusive viewpoint from both the attrition and retention perspectives. Participants were provided the latitude to expand upon their Likert-type scale responses in open-ended follow-up questions. The value of this methodology proved fruitful by providing a greater insight into how the factors affecting degree progress were dealt with by members of these groups.

The actual numbers of students surveyed within these three groups were 101 (n=68 Ed.D.'s, n=23 current ABDs, and n=10 attrited ABDs). In compiling the participant listing for this study, it was noted that the attrition rate of ABD students was 10.1% -- considerably lower than the 20% to 17.6% reported in the literature (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Quinn, 1992). The reasons for this increased retention may be explained by examining the relationship between the student, the dissertation chair, and the dissertation committee.

The results of this study indicate that the positive influences of the Relationship With Dissertation Chair (93.6%), the Relationship With Dissertation Committee (90.5%),

Committee Chair (79.4%), and Committee – other than Chair (68.3%) contribute to student degree progress. One of the most positive aspects of the doctoral program in this study is the active involvement of their faculty as mentors. Each doctoral student is provided continual program guidance from the faculty. The faculty prides itself on keeping in constant contact with students, which is accomplished through one-on-one meetings, telephone conversations, and exchanges of e-mail, Fax, or postal mailings. Students are routinely afforded the opportunity to participate in group functions to exchange ideas and seek answers to common concerns. The faculty advisors frequently offer their homes and hospitality to commuter students from remote locations. This active involvement and genuine concern for students appears to be reflected in the low attrition rate of ABDs from the program.

Universities should develop and encourage an ongoing mentoring program that provides needed support services to doctoral students. As Cooper (1997) recommended, the experienced faculty could serve as mentors, while the newer faculty could function more in the doctoral-student advising capacity. It is important that these faculty participants receive professional mentoring training to accomplish their task. This mentoring program could be expanded to include doctoral students who have reached ABD status or are well within their program of study. Dorn et al. (1995) found that “peers make excellent educators” (p. 313). Both faculty mentors and student mentors from the same program could be assigned to each incoming doctoral student. Far too often doctoral students do not know where to seek help or are reluctant to appear unknowledgeable about a particular issue. This “loss” includes not knowing which courses to take during which semester (since all courses are not offered each semester);

when and where to file for degree plans, interim exams or qualification exams; and how to obtain financial aid, grants, or scholarship opportunities. The mentoring from both a faculty and student would enhance the doctoral experience and increase the chances for student success. It also enables the university to have a vehicle for student feedback pertaining to the quality of services provided by the institution.

This study found that Academic Advisement had a positive influence on the degree progress of 65% of the survey respondents. Active academic advisement, mentoring, and support of ABD students are also essential issues in increasing retention and graduation rates within the institution. Commuter doctoral students may easily become detached from the university environment and not only need -- but deserve active involvement from their faculty advisor and mentor. Contact could be enhanced through regular meetings on a schedule agreed to by both parties. These meetings should include setting a timetable for accomplishments, such as developing the dissertation proposal, conducting the research, developing and mailings of survey instruments, and writing the various chapters of the dissertation. Actual communications should routinely incorporate all forms of communications, such as one-on-one meetings, telephone, e-mail, Fax, and postal mailings.

The relationship between the dissertation committee chair (advisor) and the dissertation student (advisee) can sometimes deteriorate or, at the very least, encounter periods of misunderstanding. Davis and Parker (1997) suggested that using a systematic approach to the advisor-advisee relationship and “implied contract” could greatly facilitate the student completion of the dissertation. This contract would outline the

responsibilities of each party during the dissertation stage of the program. Items for the advisor would include the following:

Provide guidance; Respond to the papers given to read within a reasonable time; Be reasonably consistent in advise; Protect the student from unreasonable demands; Assist the student at those times when the voice of a faculty member advocate is necessary; and generally aid the student in pursuing the dissertation project. (p. 11)

The doctoral student would be expected to do

Do what he or she says will be done when promised (or explain why it cannot be done); Have integrity in research and writing; Keep in communication; Prepare documents for comment; Follow a method of presentation that effectively uses the advisor's and committee's time; Be reasonable in making demands on the time of the advisor and the committee; Be open to suggestions and to advise, but also show initiative. (p. 11)

The results of this study found that Employer Supportiveness had a positive influence on the degree progress of 87.3% of the survey respondents. Additionally, the positive influences of Family Support (88.9%), Family Support of Doctoral Study (87.3%), and Employment (49.2%) contributed to student degree progress. The negative influences of Family Commitments (65%), Personal Obligations (57.1%), and Family Obligations (47.6%) were found to affect degree progress. One must understand the impact of the dissertation upon family, job, and time. It is a matter of choice and commitment. The doctoral program is in itself a difficult task for many to accomplish -- attrition rates of 40% to 60% support this premise (Berelson, 1960; Bowen & Rudenstine,

1992; Cheatham, Edwards, & Erikson, 1982; Cuetara & LeCapitaine, 1991). However, the dissertation is by far the most demanding upon one's time and organizational skills. If a logical and systematic approach to time management and obligations is accomplished and adhered to; the dissertation process can be completed. It is essential that the students communicate this commitment to themselves, their families and friends, business and social organizations, and anyone else who has demands upon their time.

Employment and Demands of the Job during the dissertation are some of the most influential factors affecting completion. As found in the research and in this study, many doctoral students are married and are between the ages of 40 and 49 years of age. They have established themselves in the community, one of the spouses or both work full-time, and many times the other is employed part-time. The results of this study found that 87.3% of survey respondents financed the degree through full-time employment. This employment necessity places demands upon time and financial resources. These students soon feel the burden of the commute, class attendance, finances, family and personal obligations, community and academic involvement, and a myriad of other complexities. The "balance" of work – school – obligations – and play is essential to maintaining one's motivation, persistence, and sense of well-being. As Wright (1991) proposed almost a decade ago, "ABD individuals are urged to become fully aware of the work load they will face when employed" (p. 52).

Family support is an essential element in coping with the rigors of the dissertation; however, family members may not fully understand the complexities and frustrations encountered when developing the dissertation. Peer support groups, and dissertation study groups may be able to fill this void and provide an additional source of

encouragement for those entering the dissertation portion of their program. Support groups offer a source of encouragement, collaboration, and help not as easily accomplished by faculty advisement and mentoring alone. These support groups benefit all parties by helping “members stay focused, finish their doctorates and feel better about themselves in the process” (Stalker, 1991, p. 56). “The ideal source of support is from someone who is actually going through the dissertation process at the same time” (Monsour & Corman, 1991, p. 182).

This study found that the negative influences of Stress (55.6%) and Anxiety (42.0%) affected degree progress. Coping with stress and anxiety during the dissertation can be a difficult task. While stress and anxiety can be a positive influence in maintaining motivation and persistence, it can also be detrimental to one’s progress and health. It is important that students are made aware of how to identify the symptoms and adverse affects of stress. This could be accomplished through student/faculty workshops, counseling, or seminars and would be an excellent source of information exchange while helping to improve the “contact time” between these two factions. Additionally, faculty mentors can be a source of information and guidance to students who encounter stress and anxiety during the dissertation process. However, “if students try strategies for coping and still experience the negative aspects of stress, then faculty should encourage students to seek professional counseling or therapy” (Whitman, Spendlove, & Clark, 1986, p. 2).

Respondents in this study reported that Writing Skills (81%) and Research Skills (79.4%) had a positive affect on degree progress. Student research, writing, and presentation skills may be developed through increased participation in academia.

Nielson (1998) found that increased student involvement equates with greater satisfaction in the overall academic experience. This is especially important for those who have reached the ABD stage and feel somewhat alienated from academia. Students should seek opportunities to join student or professional organizations to increase their contact with those in similar situations. Meeting and exchanging ideas with others in a formal or informal environment is essential to one's development. This may include participating in conference presentations; developing and publishing articles in professional journals; participating in formal forum workgroups, workshops, or seminars; or becoming an active member of professional or graduate student organizations. The increased contact may lead to lifelong professional relationships that are of mutual benefit to both the individual and the organization.

This study found that Topic Selection had a positive influence on the degree progress of 71.4% of survey respondents. Faculty mentors and program departments should encourage students to arrive at a dissertation topic while in their early stages of coursework. The advantages to accomplishing early topic selection are numerous and include designing the degree plan and selecting required and optional coursework along the lines of the topic; directing class research and writings towards the dissertation topic; seeking opportunities for publication or presentation of associated research; becoming more familiar with research and technical writing; and most importantly, increasing the opportunities for contact with the faculty advisor or mentor.

Topic selection should (1) sustain interest and stimulate imagination, (2) be manageable in size - too many doctoral students "begin with a topic that is too large to be handled successfully", (3) within one's range of competence, (4) have

the potential to make an original contribution to the sum of human knowledge, and (5) permit the student to demonstrate their independent mastery of both the subject and the appropriate research method. (Madsen, 1992, p. 23)

Higher education programs should include an active series of information exchanges between faculty and students. Support seminars for doctoral students should be conducted by current ABD and graduated students from the program. Seminars would be informal but structured for exchange of information about the doctoral program. These seminars could be offered for doctoral students at two important junctures of the program – entry into the doctoral program as a new student and entry into doctoral candidacy as an ABD student. Attendance by doctoral students at these seminars should not be optional, but a requirement (i.e., 1 credit-hour course) to proceed to the next stage of their program. The “how-to’s” and “look-out-for’s” during these stages would benefit all members of these groups. Suggestions for additional resources could be made available to these students during these seminars. Some of these resources include Steinberg’s (1981), How to Complete and Survive a Doctoral Dissertation; Gardner and Beatty’s (1980), Dissertation Proposal Guidebook: How to Prepare a Research Proposal and Get It Accepted; or the on-line resources of “The Dissertation Doctor” at <http://www.dissertationdoctor.com>; “Dissertation News” through the Association for Support of Graduate Students at <http://www.asgs.org>; and the “All-But-Dissertation Survival Guide” by Ben Dean at <http://www.ecoach.com>. These are but a few outstanding resources available to all doctoral students.

It is also recommended that all graduate, especially doctoral program administrators, track the retention and attrition rates of those in their degree programs.

This information is essential in evaluating the program and instruction. In addition, exit interviews from graduates and attrited doctoral candidates would provide a wealth of information and feedback to university program administrators about their programs. As described by Lovitts (1997b), the absence of accurate exit interviewing or feedback inhibits administrators from obtaining the actual reasons for incompleteness of degree programs. It is important that the factors affecting degree progress be identified and that the actual reasons or circumstances of attrition are known, in hopes others will not succumb to the same fate by the same circumstances. University administrators should maintain an accurate and up-to-date database of all students who have completed or are exiting the university. The database of addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses would be available to student service organizations, individual program offices, and alumni personnel.

Suggestions for Further Research and Actions

The following are suggested areas of research that are believed to enhance the retention rates of doctoral candidates in higher education.

1. An investigation should be conducted to determine the extent of interaction and influence of the factors affecting the degree progress of doctoral students.
2. An investigation should be completed into the value of doctoral student workshops and seminars to obtain and exchange information prior to completing the coursework degree plan as a doctoral student and again before entering doctoral candidacy.
3. A study into the value of the residency requirement for commuter students should be completed.

4. It is recommended that faculty and peer mentoring studies be conducted to ascertain their effectiveness in doctoral student retention.

5. It is recommended that more funding opportunities, such as financial aid, grants, and student scholarships are made available to all doctoral students regardless of their enrollment status.

6. It is recommended that a study be completed on the stress and anxiety factors encountered by the doctoral student during the dissertation portion of the program. It may also be of interest to include the dissertations family in this investigation.

7. Research should be completed to obtain the value of an “implied contract” between advisor-advisee to outline the responsibilities of each party during the dissertation stage of the program.

8. All doctoral students should be required to complete a dissertation development course. In addition to receiving guidance in developing the proposal and dissertation, the course should require every student to attend to at least one dissertation proposal defense and dissertation defense before completing the course. Additional preparation for the dissertation could be achieved through student role-playing exercises.

9. It is recommended that each doctoral student utilize the resources of a professional proofreader and if necessary – a competent computer typist.

10. A follow-up study should be conducted involving the current ABD students who were subjects in this study and future doctoral candidates from the Higher Education Doctoral Program.

APPENDIX A
RESEARCH SITE APPROVAL

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
College of Education

Box 41071
Lubbock, TX 79409-1071
(806) 742-1997 ext. 302
FAX (806) 742-2179

April 14, 2000

Eric D. Malmberg
114 Pebble Beach Drive
Trophy Club, TX 76262

Sub: Research Project

Dear Mr. Malmberg,

Thank you for your recent request to conduct your dissertation research project at Texas Tech University. We have reviewed your proposal, survey questionnaire, and supporting information. It is our understanding that the focus will be upon current and past doctoral candidates from our higher education program. For clarification, this group will be those who completed their coursework, comprehensive exams, and residency requirements from 1991 through 2000.

We share your interest in ascertaining the quality of service and experiences from this student group and offer our full support. If possible, we would like to receive a copy of your completed study. This information will be an asset to our program evaluation and planning efforts.

Your primary contacts at Texas Tech will be:

Albert B. Smith, Ph.D.
(806) 742-1997 x302
Fax: (806) 742-2179
ismit@ttacs.ttu.edu

Brent D. Cejda, Ph.D.
(806) 742-1997 x273
Fax: (806) 742-2179
bcejda@ttacs.ttu.edu

Thank you for considering our program for your research project. We believe it will be a mutually rewarding experience. If we can be of any further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

(Original Signature)

Albert B. Smith, Ph.D.
Professor and Coordinator
Higher Education Program

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

APPENDIX C

HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Subject Name: _____ Date: _____

Title of Study: Retention and Attrition of Doctoral Candidates In Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Eric D. Malmberg

Co-Investigators: Dr. Michael K. Altekruze III

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the proposed procedures. It describes the procedures, benefits, risks, discomforts of the study. It also describes the alternative treatments that are available to you and your right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees or assurances can be made as to the results of the study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND HOW LONG IT WILL LAST:

The purpose of this study is to examine the retention and attrition of doctoral candidates in the Higher Education Doctoral Program in the College of Education at Texas Tech University between the periods of 1991 through 2000. The period for gathering data from participants will start in August and conclude before November 2000.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY INCLUDING THE PROCEDURES TO BE USED:

You were selected from a comprehensive list of "All But Dissertation" ABD students in the Higher Education Doctoral Program at Texas Tech University who were admitted to candidacy from 1991 through 2000; those who have previously met the residency requirements, course completion, and successful completion of the Qualifying Exams.

This study consists of obtaining response to questions concerning factors that affected program completion or attrition. Information gathered from responses to these questions may help to identify key factors affecting graduate degree progress at Texas Tech University. Your frank and honest opinions in response to questions will be very helpful in gaining a better understanding of your experiences as a doctoral candidate. You will be asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire concerning your doctoral experience, which should take fifteen to twenty minutes to complete.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Subject Name: _____ Date: _____

Title of Study: Retention and Attrition of Doctoral Candidates In Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Eric D. Malmberg

Co-Investigators: Dr. Michael K. Altekruuse III

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES/ELEMENTS THAT MAY RESULT IN DISCOMFORT OR INCONVENIENCE:

There are no anticipated or foreseeable procedures or elements of this project that will result in discomfort or inconvenience.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCEDURES/ELEMENTS THAT ARE ASSOCIATED WITH FORESEEABLE RISKS:

There are no anticipated or foreseeable physical or emotional risks to you.

BENEFITS TO THE SUBJECTS OR OTHERS:

The research study is intended to identify the effect of specific, predetermined factors on completion or non-completion of the doctoral degree in higher education. This study will be an opportunity for you to provide comments about your experiences in the dissertation process within the Higher Education Doctoral Program. The exploratory nature of this study will enable you the opportunity to elaborate on factors from your personal experience that also affected these outcomes. You will be given the opportunity to address the relevant factors in the following areas: the dissertation experience, advisement experience, personal experience, financial experience, and the employment experience.

By examining key factors in the doctorate degree experience, this study will be able to draw some conclusions on how doctoral attrition evolves over time. The rich descriptors afforded by case study research will allow indepth, intensive examination of individual cases in an attempt to develop and understand principles of attrition. Reconstructing and comparing the experiences of ABDs from the point of candidacy to the point of attrition or completion of the program will determine the factors to success. Data from this study may be of even greater benefit in making modifications to existing or future programs.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH RECORDS:

Confidentiality is guaranteed in this study. The researcher will not release identifiable information regarding the participants at any time. Only the researchers will know your identity. Each returned questionnaire will be coded alpha-numerically for the researcher's use. Participants will be referred to only by codified information of whether they completed, withdrew, or remained in the Higher Education Doctoral Program at Texas Tech University.

A reference list of the coded participants will be secured in a locked box and placed away from the research materials. This data will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Subject Name: _____ Date: _____

Title of Study: Retention and Attrition of Doctoral Candidates In Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Eric D. Malmberg

Co-Investigators: Dr. Michael K. Altekruuse III

REVIEW FOR PROTECTION OF PARTICIPANTS:

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (940) 565-3940.

RESEARCH SUBJECTS' RIGHTS: I have read or have had read to me all of the above.

Eric D. Malmberg has explained the study to me and answered all of my questions. I have been told the risks or discomforts and possible benefits of the study. I have been told of other choices of treatment available to me.

I understand that I do not have to take part in this study, and my refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of rights to which I am entitled. I may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am entitled. The study personnel can stop my participation at any time if it appears to be harmful to me, if I fail to follow directions for participation in the study, if it is discovered that I do not meet the study requirements, or if the study is canceled.

In case there are problems or questions, I have been told I can call Eric D. Malmberg at telephone number: (817) 491-4716.

I understand my rights as a research subject, and I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I understand what the study is about and how and why it is being done. I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject's Signature

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

For the Investigator or Designee:

I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above, who, in my opinion, understood the explanation. I have explained the known benefits and risks of the research.

Principal Investigator's Signature

Date

APPENDIX D

LETTER OF PURPOSE/FOLLOW-UP LETTER OF PURPOSE

Eric D. Malmberg
114 Pebble Beach Drive
Trophy Club, Texas 76262
August 18, 2000

Dear Colleague:

You have been specially selected to participate in a research study, which will examine retention and attrition factors of doctoral candidates and past graduates from the Higher Education Doctoral Program at Texas Tech University from 1991 to 2000. As a member of a relatively small sample of students, your participation is critical to the success of this study.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, and by the Department of Counseling, Development, and Higher Education at the University of North Texas, as well as the Higher Education Program faculty at Texas Tech University.

You are asked to take about fifteen minutes to complete the enclosed self-administered Questionnaire concerning your doctoral experience at Texas Tech University. Your responses to questions concerning factors that affected your program completion or attrition are essential in ensuring project success with a 100% response. Your frank and honest responses to these questions will be very helpful in gaining a better understanding of your experiences and identifying key factors affecting graduate degree progress.

Confidentiality is guaranteed in this study - only the researcher will know your identity. The researcher will not release identifiable information regarding you or any other participants at any time. Each returned questionnaire will be coded alpha-numerically for the researcher's use. Participants will be referred to only by codified information of whether they completed, withdrew, or remained in the Higher Education Doctoral Program at Texas Tech University. A reference list of the coded participants will be secured in a locked box and placed away from the research materials. This data will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study.

I will greatly appreciate your participation in this study and ask that you (1) complete the questionnaire, (2) sign and date the Research Consent Form (indicating your voluntary consent to participate in this study), and (3) **return these items in the enclosed, preaddressed stamped envelope, PRIOR TO SEPTEMBER 10, 2000.**

Questions and concerns about this research or its conduct should be addressed to the UNT Institutional Review Board contact telephone number, (940) 565-3940 or myself at:

Eric D. Malmberg
114 Pebble Beach Drive
Trophy Club, Texas 76262

Phone: (817) 491-4716
E-mail: emalmberg@home.com
FAX: (817) 491-4875

Thank you for your kind attention to this request. Your opinions and experiences are essential to the successful completion of this study. Additionally, if you would be interested in a follow-up interview, please provide a telephone number or e-mail address for contact. Also, if you would like to receive the results of this study, please provide your preferred mailing address in the return package.

Sincerely,

Eric D. Malmberg

Eric D. Malmberg
114 Pebble Beach Drive
Trophy Club, Texas 76262
August 28, 2000

Dear Colleague:

Recently, I mailed you a questionnaire seeking your opinions about your experiences in the Higher Education Doctoral Program at Texas Tech University. I am grateful that so many surveys have been returned, but as of this date, I have not received your response. If you have already completed and returned the survey, disregard this second request and please accept my sincere thanks for your participation.

If you have not completed the survey, please take 15 minutes right now to share your perceptions on these issues. Your opinions are important, and what you have to say about your experiences, are very important

For your convenience, a new questionnaire, Research Consent Form, and preaddressed stamped envelope are enclosed. Please return the completed questionnaire and signed Research Consent Form in the preaddressed stamped envelope to me as soon as possible. You may be assured of complete confidentiality. If you do not wish to participate in this project, please return these items (uncompleted) and I will not send any further requests.

Questions and concerns about this research or its conduct should be addressed to the UNT Institutional Review Board contact telephone number, (940) 565-3940 or myself at:

Eric D. Malmberg
114 Pebble Beach Drive
Trophy Club, Texas 76262

Phone: (817) 491-4716
E-mail: emalmberg@home.com
FAX: (817) 491-4875

Again, thank you for your participation,

Sincerely,

Eric D. Malmberg

APPENDIX E

REPLICATION AND QUESTIONNAIRE APPROVAL

Dr. Lawrence Myers
Vice Principal
Indian Head Elementary School
4200 Indian Head Highway
Indian Head, MD 20640
May 26, 2000

Eric D. Malmberg
114 Pebble Beach Drive
Trophy Club, TX 76262

Subject: Dissertation Project

Dr. Mr. Malmberg,

This letter is in response to your request - You have my permission to use and replicate the design, survey questions (questionnaire), and associated information from my January 1999 dissertation study at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University titled: "Barriers to Completion of the Doctoral Degree in Educational Administration" for your dissertation project at the University of North Texas.

It is understood, of course, that full credit, acknowledgement, and recognition for my research and concept development will be given in your project.

Additionally, I request that your dissertation abstract and any subsequent published material relating to your study be provided upon completion. If possible, I would also be interested in receiving a full copy of your completed study.

Best of luck in your research – I look forward to your completion.

Sincerely,

(Original Signed)

Dr. Lawrence H. Myers

APPENDIX F

QUESTIONNAIRE/SURVEY INSTRUMENT

QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: Please read and then respond to the following 20 questions, this should take you about 15 minutes to complete. Some questions may ask you to fill in the blanks, place an (X) or (✓) in blank spaces or boxes provided, or circle the best answers. Please select the response that best fits your situation and recollection.

1. What was your age when starting the dissertation portion of your doctoral program?

____ 21-29 ____ 30-39 ____ 40-49 ____ 50-59 ____ 60+

2. What is your gender? ____ Male ____ Female

3. What is your ethnic background?

____ African American ____ Asian ____ Hispanic ____ Native American
____ Caucasian ____ Other (please specify _____)

4. How would you describe your marital status during the dissertation portion of your doctoral program?

____ Single, never married ____ Married ____ Separated ____ Divorced ____ Widowed

5. To what extent did you stay involved with the institutional environment? (i.e., student organizations, activities, and social events)

Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Please elaborate _____

6. Did you participate in an academic peer support group after completing the qualifying exams? Yes or No

If you answered “yes” – how would you describe this experience?

Outstanding Excellent Good Fair Poor
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

7. The Higher Education Research Seminar (EDHE 6310) was beneficial to increasing my abilities to conduct independent research.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

8. Did you experience “writer’s block” while formulating or writing any portion of the dissertation? Yes or No

If so, how were you able to overcome it? _____

9. How did each of the following factors influence your degree progress?

Positively	Negatively	N/A		Positively	Negatively	N/A	
_____	_____	_____	Academic Advisement (a)	_____	_____	_____	Academic Mentoring (b)
_____	_____	_____	Age (c)	_____	_____	_____	Anxiety (d)
_____	_____	_____	Committee (other than Chair) (e)	_____	_____	_____	Committee Chair (f)
_____	_____	_____	Employment (g)	_____	_____	_____	Family Obligations (h)
_____	_____	_____	Family Support (i)	_____	_____	_____	Finance Assistance (j)
_____	_____	_____	Gender (k)	_____	_____	_____	Involvement within the University (l)
_____	_____	_____	Motivation (m)	_____	_____	_____	Other Obligations (n)
_____	_____	_____	Perfectionism (o)	_____	_____	_____	Persistence (p)
_____	_____	_____	Procrastination (q)	_____	_____	_____	Program Requirements (r)
_____	_____	_____	Race (s)	_____	_____	_____	Research Skills (t)
_____	_____	_____	Stress (u)	_____	_____	_____	Support Groups (outside academia) (v)
_____	_____	_____	Support Groups (in academia) (w)	_____	_____	_____	Writing Skills (x)
_____	_____	_____	Time-to-Degree (y)	_____	_____	_____	Topic Selection (z)

10. Were changes made to your dissertation committee (chair and members) after completing the qualifying exams? Yes or No

If changes were made, who initiated them and why? _____

11. My relationship with the dissertation committee chair could best be described as:

Outstanding	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What are some examples of how your chair helped or hindered you? _____

12. My relationship with the dissertation committee could best be described as:

Outstanding	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What are some examples of how your committee helped or hindered you? _____

13. Which of the following employment, financial, or personal factors do you feel adversely affected your dissertation progress? (Please check (✓) the appropriate responses)

<input type="checkbox"/> Change of Income (a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Demands of Job (f)	<input type="checkbox"/> Lost Job/Employment (k)	<input type="checkbox"/> Received Promotion (o)
<input type="checkbox"/> Retired (b)	<input type="checkbox"/> Work Related Travel (g)	<input type="checkbox"/> Commute to University (l)	<input type="checkbox"/> Financial Problems (p)
<input type="checkbox"/> Lost Financial Aid (c)	<input type="checkbox"/> Cost of Doctorate (h)	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal Health/Injury (m)	<input type="checkbox"/> Marriage (q)
<input type="checkbox"/> Divorce/Separation (d)	<input type="checkbox"/> Family Obligations (i)	<input type="checkbox"/> Death of Family Member (n)	<input type="checkbox"/> Family Member Health/Injury (r)
<input type="checkbox"/> Birth of Child (e)	<input type="checkbox"/> Stress/Anxiety (j)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) (s)	

How did this impede your progress? _____

14. In general, was your family supportive of your study for the doctorate? Yes or No

15. To what extent did family commitments take time away from your doctoral studies? (Please circle the appropriate response)

Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
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Please elaborate _____

16. To what extent did personal obligations take time away from your doctoral studies? (Please circle the appropriate response)

Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
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Please elaborate _____

17. What percentages of the following financial options were used to fund your doctoral studies? (i.e., 15%, 20%, 50%, etc.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Part-time Employment	<input type="checkbox"/> Grant(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Financial Aid	<input type="checkbox"/> Gift(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal Loan(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> Full-time Employment	<input type="checkbox"/> Savings	<input type="checkbox"/> Scholarship(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)	

18. If employed, was your employer supportive of your completing your degree? Yes or No

19. What would have made your doctoral experience a better one? _____

20. What other factors (positive or negative) affected your degree progress that have not been covered in the previous questions? _____

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY. PLEASE MAIL THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE BEFORE SEPTEMBER 10TH

**Eric D. Malmberg
114 Pebble Beach Drive
Trophy Club, TX 76262**

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